



**The Winston  
Churchill  
Memorial Trust  
of Australia**

REPORT BY:  
Jacqueline Reed – 2014 Churchill Fellow

PROJECT:  
To improve the life outcomes for young  
people transitioning from statutory care  
to independence



## HELPING HANDS, HEALING HEARTS

Perhaps the greatest teachers  
are the fearless souls who take you  
where you did not dare to go.

They teach you to stand tall in life  
and seek the truths  
that none can teach you.

They applaud you when you find your way,  
and gird you with the courage and tenacity  
to travel further.

They inspire you, they believe in you,  
they make you walk on air.

I know the greatest teachers  
are the ones who really care.

Jo McFarlane (2015)



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# 1. executive summary

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## 1.1 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Australian research indicates that young people transitioning from out-of-home care (foster, kinship, and residential) to independence have diminished life outcomes compared with those of the general population (McDowall, 2009; Mendes, Johnson, & Moslehuddin, 2011; Stein, 2012). This report aims to explore and identify the success factors that aid the transition process and to understand the potential barriers that impede young care leavers' successful post-care outcomes.

## 1.2 HIGHLIGHTS

The challenge of this project was to connect with key stakeholders within the identified groups, viz., researchers, workers, and young people. The shroud of privacy surrounding young people with a care experience, and the challenges in locating them post care proved to be a significant obstacle. However, this is no different from the situation in Australia where the barriers are similar, with the major difference being that in Australia the CREATE Foundation is known within the sector; its reputation as a non-partisan and independent advocate often "opens doors" and aids the process of collaboration.

Interviews were conducted in The Netherlands, United Kingdom, and France with researchers, workers, and young people who have "lived experience" of the care system. Professor Mike Stein's book *Young People's Transitions from Care to Adulthood: International Research and Practice* provided fertile ground for understanding the issues across 16 countries, and in identifying the leading researchers in the field of transitioning from care. I would like to extend my gratitude to Professor Stein the "guru" of transitioning from care. His depth of knowledge of the UK system is unparalleled. He is an inspiration, and gave generously

of his time and provided an excellent background of the current issues facing young care leavers in the UK.

Thanks to the many researchers, workers, and young people who went out of their way to meet with me and share their insights. I found it inspiring to meet with so many people with whom I shared an interest and passion for out-of-home care, and particularly the journey from transition to independence. Meeting with young people is invigorating and provides context for the work that I do. I am always amazed at their strength of character and willingness to voice their opinions in an attempt to improve the system for those that come after them. As always, I am humbled by their courage and ability to bounce back after adversity.

Special thanks to the "gang" in Hull in particular Ian and Kay Bolton, Craig Clark, and the amazing workers or rather "ex" workers (due to closure of their service) from the Warren who provided valuable insight into the issues facing young care leavers in the Hull area. Their ability to remain resolute and continue to support young people despite the odds was nothing short of inspirational against a backdrop of funding cuts, job losses, and new "top down initiatives".

## 1.3 MAJOR LESSONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Interestingly, from research and the personal accounts of researchers, workers, and young people, it appears that there are more similarities than differences in the countries visited regarding the outcomes for young people transitioning from care. The issues, challenges, and obstacles within the three child protection systems often mirrored one another. In addition, the success factors outlined by all three groups were often humanistic rather than systemic, and focused heavily on support networks and relationships.



Young people identified three themes that aided their transition experience. The first was to be adequately informed and involved in the process of leaving care; the second was to have strong support networks and connections with key people and within the community; and the third was to have practical life skills training that buffered them against failure when living independently.

The manner in which the identified “success factors” and associated recommendations can be packaged and communicated to the sector and young people are many and varied, and will include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Disseminating the Churchill Report:
  - CREATE Foundation website
  - Over 12’s clubCREATE magazine (readership 5,000 members)
  - Social media – key messages communicated through CREATE’s social media
  - Promoting through CREATE’s e-news to key stakeholders within Australia;
- Promoting the key messages and findings to the sector – at a workshop during CREATE’s international “Youth for Change” conference (Brisbane, October 2-4, 2015);
- Advocating key messages and findings from the report to state jurisdictions and federal government through correspondence and meetings;
- Articulating the key messages and findings to CREATE’s young consultants through Youth Advisory Group meetings held within states/territories.

**“The shroud of privacy surrounding young people with a care experience, and the challenges in locating them post care proved to be a significant obstacle. However, this is no different from the situation in Australia where the barriers are similar”**

# 2. programme

## LIST OF PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONS VISITED

<i>Dr Annemiek Harder</i>	<i>Researcher, University of Groningen</i>
<i>Dr Monica Lopez</i>	<i>Researcher, University of Groningen</i>
<i>Young person (alias Mary)</i>	<i>Young person interview, Groningen</i>
<i>Dr Emily Munro</i>	<i>Researcher, Institute of Education, University of London</i>
<i>Belinda Cashman and Julie Mepham</i>	<i>Organisation: Platform 89, Leeds</i>
<i>Dr Justin Rogers</i>	<i>Researcher, University of Bath</i>
<i>Young person (alias Vicki)</i>	<i>Bath</i>
<i>Ian Bolton</i>	<i>Freedom Road Creative Arts</i>
<i>Freedom Road Creative Arts</i>	<i>Performance by young people</i>
<i>Craig Clark</i>	<i>Social Worker, Hull</i>
<i>Young person (alias Vicki)</i>	<i>Young person interview, Hull</i>
<i>Young person (alias Debbie)</i>	<i>Young person interview, Hull</i>
<i>Young person (alias Robert)</i>	<i>Young person interview, Hull</i>
<i>Young person (alias Ivan)</i>	<i>Young person interview, Hull</i>
<i>Young person (alias Cynthia)</i>	<i>Young person interview, Hull</i>
<i>Lisa Hunter</i>	<i>Leaving Care Team Manager, Hull</i>
<i>Andy McCabe</i>	<i>Targeted Youth Support Manager, Hull</i>
<i>Professor Mike Stein</i>	<i>Researcher, Social Policy Research Unit, Uni of York</i>
<i>Conference</i>	<i>BAPSCAN Conference, Edinburgh</i>
<i>Young person (alias Jenny)</i>	<i>Young person interview, Edinburgh</i>
<i>Claire McAlpine</i>	<i>Social Worker, Edinburgh</i>
<i>Young person (alias Phillipe Baillie)</i>	<i>Young person interview, Paris</i>
<i>Young person activity with two workers (Marie-Elise Legrand and Aimée Morel)</i>	<i>Forum activity: Bayeux, France</i>
<i>12 young people (aliases Monique, Giselle, Mathis, Timeo, Lilou, Ines, Jules, Yanis, Eva, Sacha, Alexis, and Nina)</i>	<i>Forum / Group activity: picnic, Bayeux, France</i>
<i>Young persons (alias Lilou, Nina, Timeo,</i>	<i>Young person's interviews - Paris</i>

“You should have  
the option to stay  
in foster care if  
you want to stay”

Quotation from Young People presented in the Ofsted Report (2012)



# 3. fellowship report: main body

In an attempt to protect children and young people at risk of abuse or neglect within their birth family, statutory bodies bring them into the out-of-home care system. While this is a noble intent, it is fraught with challenges as the “system” itself is often over-burdened, lacks resources, and is so bureaucratic in nature that it often impedes the very goals it strives to achieve.

It is assumed by the wider community that bringing children and young people into care is a good thing; because of this action, they will be protected from harm and subsequently lead fulfilling lives. In an ideal world this would be the case. However, the reality is that it is a complex issue, and for over-burdened systems with a lack of resources (in particular a scarcity of carers), the prognosis for young people leaving the care system (transitioning) remains poor despite the protection afforded them by the state. In the Australian context there are 43,009 children and young people in the out-of-home care system as of 30 June 2014 (AIHW, 2015). Of these, 41% are in foster care, 48.5% kinship care; 3.9% home based care; 5.5% in residential care and 1.1% in other types of care. Of these 14.7% (6,301) are in the 15-17 year old age group.

We know from research across the world (Akister, Owens, & Goodyer, 2010; Dixon, 2008; Stein, 2012; Tweedle, 2007) that young people transitioning from care are more likely to be:

<i>Under or unemployed</i>	<i>Inclined to have more mental health issues</i>
<i>Parenting at a younger age</i>	<i>More susceptible to drug and alcohol abuse</i>
<i>More involved with the juvenile justice system</i>	<i>Unlikely to have higher education</i>
<i>More likely to have had a homeless experience</i>	

Transitioning from statutory care to independence is a challenging part of the life cycle for arguably the most disadvantaged young people in society. My interest in this particular social phenomenon has been spurred by the many young people that I meet during the course

of my work at the CREATE Foundation. CREATE is a national non-profit organisation operating in each state and territory in Australia and its mission is to improve the lives of children and young people in the out-of-home care system.

Transitioning from care to independence has been an area of concern for the CREATE Foundation for several years with three major pieces of research (Report Cards) commissioned to highlight the issues faced by young people during the transition process (McDowall, 2008, 2009, 2011). Additionally, a supplementary report (“What’s the Answer?”, CREATE, 2010) was commissioned by the Commonwealth of Australia; this project focussed on what young care leavers felt that the system needed to do to improve the life outcomes of young people post-care.

In Australia we continue to see that planning for the transition from care to independence is not optimum, and good planning could be seen as happening by chance instead of design. Unfortunately, the common thread between the CREATE reports was that there is a systemic failure across all states and territories to plan adequately, and more importantly involve young people in the development of their plan. The 2013 Report Card *Experiencing Out-of-Home Care in Australia: The Views of Children and Young People* took a broader systemic view covering seven life domains that were articulated in the National Out-of-Home Care Standards (2011), the establishment of which was a priority project under the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009 – 2020. In the section dealing with transitioning from care, CREATE’s benchmarking report echoed the results of previous reports, namely that the number of young people who knew of the existence of a personal transition to independence plan (that was prepared in conjunction with their worker) was a disappointing 33% of the 325 15–17 year olds in the sample. Interesting to note is that of those who had a plan only 48% claimed to have been “quite” or “very involved” in its development with 62% stating that they believed that the plan would be “quite” or “very helpful” for guiding their future and 12% saying they thought it would be of little use (McDowall, 2013).

The level and prolonged exposure to abuse is a significant factor affecting how young people adjust throughout their journey to independence. The debate about leaving care and the ways in which young people should be supported often loses sight of the fact that young people have often experienced profound trauma during their development. If you also factor in that many young people in the care system have had multiple placements while in care, which in itself is destabilising emotionally and also impacts heavily on educational outcomes due to the disruption to schooling. Such experiences can affect a young person's sense of self. It is not difficult to see that there are many factors to consider before one can develop a successful transition from care process for vulnerable young people.

Armed with this information I set out to find the "holy grail" of identifying what works in care systems around the world; the elusive "success" factors that aid the transition process for young care leavers in order to learn from, and potentially replicate them in an Australian context.



### 3.1 THE NETHERLANDS

As North, Knot-Dickscheit & Strijker (2008) reported, there were 35,435 children and young people

in the out-of-home care system in the Netherlands. This comprised 20,063 in family foster care and 15,372 in residential youth care. Interestingly, these figures show a different pattern from those reported in 2000 with a reversal of numbers in the two care types. In 2000 there were 11,646 in foster care and 20,126 young people in residential youth care. Drawing on research she and her colleagues have conducted in Groningen (Harder, Zeller, Lopez, Kongeter, & Knorth, 2013), Dr Annemiek Harder explained that it is widely believed that the move towards foster care as the preferable option is driven by several factors: (a) the negative perception within the broader community about residential care (that it is not optimum for children), and (b) a view that family-

based care is more desirable, as well as foster care being cheaper than residential care.

From January 1, 2015 a new youth care system began operating in The Netherlands, one with a focus on prevention, and increased collaboration between professionals and families to ensure a more efficient, coherent, and cost effective system (Bosscher, 2014). The relevant legislation was revised to provide one legal framework for all child and youth related issues. This essentially represented a move to a decentralised

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model where all administrative and financial responsibilities are transferred from the national and regional government to local government. The idea is to integrate service delivery and coordinate services from the local context. After speaking with researchers, workers, and young people, it seems that there is a shared view that the move to decentralised services is premised on cost saving rather than on providing a holistic and responsive service system for young people. They also shared the view that there was limited consultation with the sector during the development of the new Act that does little to evoke confidence. This position was supported by Bosscher who reported on the national government's intention to introduce a single funding system for all youth care services, complete with a reduction in funding of 3% in 2015 increasing to a cut of 15% in 2018.

The impact of the new Act for young care leavers is largely unknown and will no doubt become clearer over time. There is a paucity of research on the outcomes for young care leavers from either foster or residential care. However, what is known mirrors CREATE's findings in the various Report Cards; young care leavers experience problems forming social relationships, have difficulty finding and maintaining employment, suffer housing instability, and achieve poor educational outcomes. Importantly, those with a positive attitude towards leaving care and those with support fared the best (Knorth et al., 2008).

Dr Maria Lopez from the University of Groningen stated that research into foster care was emerging in the Netherlands but currently there is little available data, and what there is focusses on residential care. When asked about the types of care in the Netherlands and if the type of care correlated with improved outcomes, Dr Lopez advised that she was unaware of specific studies in the Netherlands to understand if the type of placements was a buffer against adversity and poor outcomes when transitioning from care. She went on to say that the Netherlands appeared to be hesitant to embrace kinship care as a type of suitable care. She highlighted that it was widely believed that

**“There is no independent voice for children and young people in care in the Netherlands. The Dutch Youth Institute focusses on research and policy and is a valuable resource. However, it is an adult-centric service with a website providing information to service users”**

policy makers had a mindset where the family network (kinship) would provide unsuitable carers due to issues within the birth family that in their opinion could adversely affect the success of the placement. This view was not necessarily shared by researchers and workers.

Similar to Australia, young care leavers in the Netherlands enjoy support until they turn 18 with provision for additional support till 23 (if it would be irresponsible to terminate the care process or in the case of a court order).

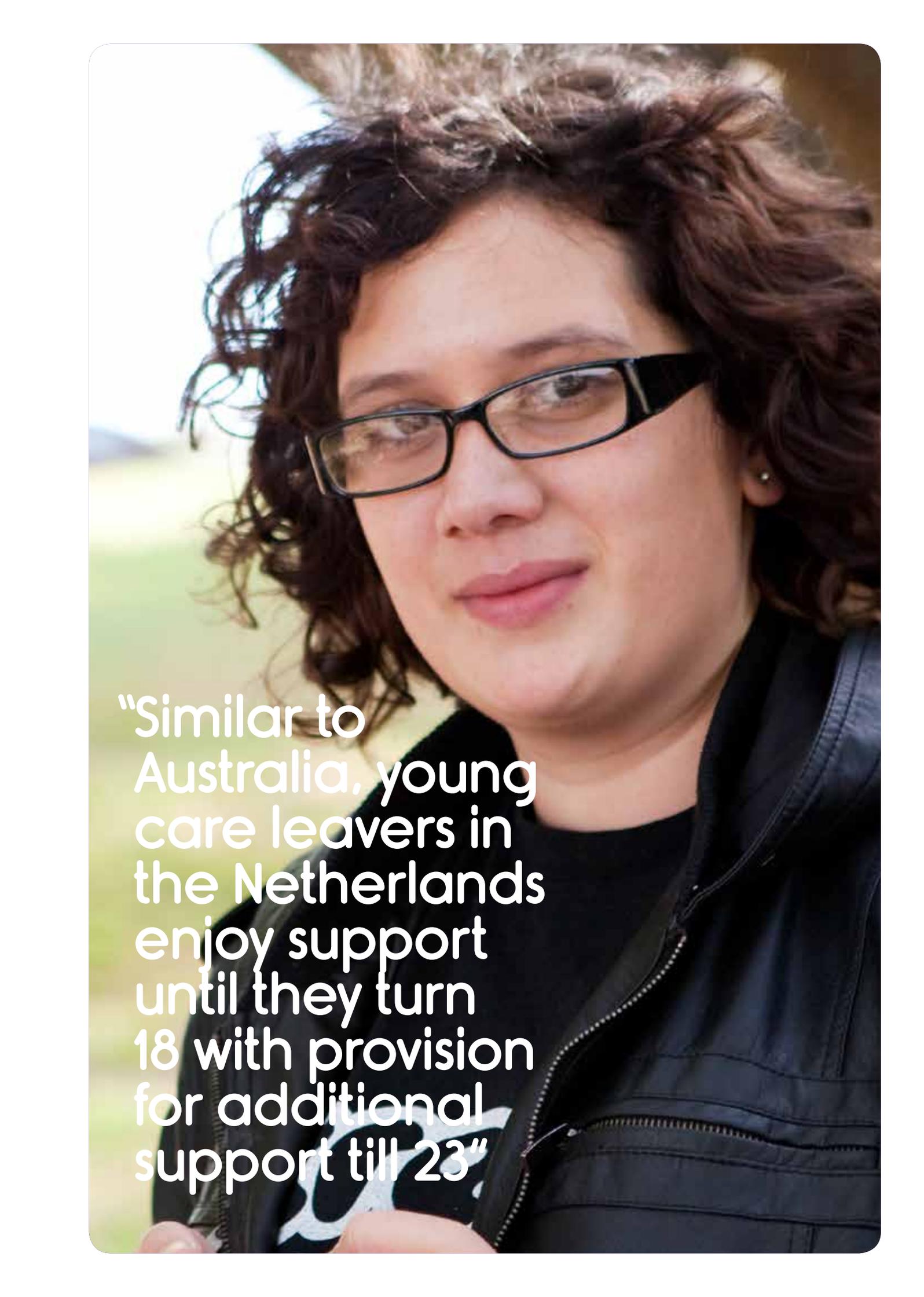
Dr Harder stated that young people usually leave care at 18; it is the exception (not the norm) to access further support until they are 23. She also stated that many care leavers don't keep in touch with residential staff after exiting care. This may be because there is no provision or expectation for the agency/service provider to continue support after the young person leaves the residential facility.

There is no independent voice for children and young people in care in the Netherlands. The Dutch Youth Institute focusses on research and policy and is a valuable resource. However, it is an adult-centric service with a website providing information to service users; it is essentially a passive interaction with young people. Therefore, addressing the issues facing young care leavers is left to dedicated researchers and workers to champion to decision makers.

Additionally, Dr Harder mentioned that each organisation providing out-of-home care services has a Youth Council. Organisations also have a person that the young people can go to if there are problems including issues with the care they receive. This is not independent and nor would it reasonably have capacity to advocate more generally, or identify themes for the issues raised by young people across the regions.

When asked to identify what works (the elusive “success” factors) for young people leaving care Dr Harder offered the following:

- Working consultatively with young people to identify potential and existing support networks and services – this would set them up well when living independently;
- Ensuring that young people are connected to their family of origin and/or siblings where appropriate and meaningful – this aids their self-confidence and provides a safety net if or when things go wrong;
- Providing clear information about what supports are available to them;
- Assisting young care leavers exiting from residential settings to learn life-skills to ensure that they are equipped to live independently.



“Similar to Australia, young care leavers in the Netherlands enjoy support until they turn 18 with provision for additional support till 23”

## CASE STUDIES

Note: All young people's names used in these case studies are pseudonyms and some details that might identify young people have been changed to protect their privacy.

### CASE STUDY 1

*Mary lives in Groningen in the Netherlands and has done so for all of her life. Mary came into care when she was eight years old and was placed with her brother into a foster home. Mary recalls that this was a very traumatic experience and that she and her brother were not clear about why they had to live with "strangers". She recalls that it was a time of confusion and tears.*

*Mary was angry that she had to move to live with strangers and she missed her family home and her friends. Mary took comfort in knowing her brother was with her but he was sad also and she felt she was looking after him like his mother and felt very protective towards him.*

*When she was about 14, Mary recalls that her anger was very intense, and that this was directed towards her carer who she reports was cold towards her; not uncaring nor abusive, but not nurturing or loving towards her and her brother. Mary reported that her behaviour was very bad and she would stay out with her friends and began drinking. The carer was very strict about this and did not approve. Mary was subsequently placed into residential care with other youth and her brother remained in the placement. She has limited access due to the breakdown of the relationship with the carer.*

*Mary recalls her residential experience as one where she realised that others were in the same situation as she and that she was not alone. Hearing the stories of others made it easier for her. Mary also liked the workers at the residential and said that they were supportive.*

*Mary thought that leaving the residential was always a long way off and she did not prepare for the situation to live independently. She recalls that when she got shared accommodation with other young people after leaving the residential when she turned 18 that she was not confident to live alone. She recalls she relied on others to show her how to cook and prepare meals and that she felt she was "useless". Mary says that she felt sad and depressed during her first 12 months away from the residential. She wished she had connected back with her family and maintained a good relationship with her carer so she could speak with her brother.*

*When asked what would have made her transition from care easier, Mary stated that young people needed to know more about living independently and what it would be like after leaving the residential. She said learning practical things like paying bills, cooking food, and cleaning would have been very useful. Mary also felt that maintaining contacts with her family and her brother would have been beneficial to help her not feel so sad and alone during this time.*

*Mary says she is happy now; she has a job, and lots of friends and is enjoying her life and independence.*

## CASE STUDY 2

*Hurrying from work at breakneck speed to meet with me, Stephan appeared; a young man with a large mop of dark hair and an engaging smile.*

*Stephan started by saying that he was not ashamed to be a young person who could not live with his parents. He was happy when he was put into care (he came into care when he was six years old); he reports it was the first time he felt safe. His carers had two boys of their own and they got along from day one. Stephen says it was not all smooth sailing and jealousy and sibling rivalry were of course a part of everyday life.*

*He remained with his carers until he turned 18 when he believes that there was an expectation from his carers and worker that he would move on to be independent. His “brothers” lived at home until their second year of University; however, he did not believe that was what he wanted for himself. Stephan reported that he enjoyed school and was great at math, he always enjoyed numbers and as he got older he wanted to do something that stretched his brain. Stephan tried to get an apprenticeship/traineeship in an electrical trade or with mechanics but after a year of trying to get into an apprenticeship he says he gave up and now works in a supermarket part-time and is doing a training course to improve his chances to get into a job that he likes. During this time he decided to live in supported accommodation that his case worker assisted him to get.*

*Stephan states he had some skills when he left care but he was pretty clueless as to how to cook and clean for himself. He reports that he lives in happy “chaos”, but manages to keep himself fed and safe.*

*When asked to identify what was successful during his transition, or what would have made the transition from care to independence more successful, Stephan reported the following:*

- Make sure that you discuss your career path with significant others and understand what the options are before leaving care;*
- Try to access decent housing – Stephan was provided with an apartment that was close to his work and public transport. He felt that this was pivotal to his being able to hold down a job and do his course;*
- Obtain good information about what your entitlements are and what supports are available;*
- Having case workers who follow up on your queries and requests is really important, building a relationship with workers is essential. It is hard when workers change as then the next one says something different. So make sure good records are kept of conversations so you know what is happening;*
- Having good friends and people that you can go to for help is really important.*



### 3.2 UNITED KINGDOM

At our meeting in Leeds, Professor Stein reported that for the year ending 2014, there were 10,310 young people who left care in the UK: of these 1,660 young people left at 16 years of age, 1,770 at 17 years of age, with the remaining 6,880 leaving at 18 years of age or over. Statistics show that the percentage of young people aged 16 and 17 leaving care has gradually reduced from 38% in 2010 to 33% in the year ending 2014.

When trying to determine if there is a correlation between placement types and the experience of transitioning from care, Professor Stein unpacked the data to highlight that over half of the young people in children's homes (residential facilities/group homes) leave care before they turn 18. These data are interesting because the figures are quite a lot higher than the third of young people who leave care at 18 who live in foster placements. So, is there a difference in the outcomes that young people experience if they leave at an earlier age, or if they are from residential or foster placements? The data paints a grim picture for young people who leave "the system" earlier, with only a quarter of young people leaving care at 16 years of age remaining in education at 19 compared with 40% of young people who left at age 18 or over.

Professor Stein indicated that there has been some gain in educational attainment over recent years with opportunities for training, employment, and education options increasing. Educational outcomes are often impeded by the inherent challenges facing young people within the care system. Placement or accommodation stability, disrupted schooling, learning difficulties, and mental health issues all impact on the ability of the young person to reach their educational potential. He also pointed out that targeted career support, practical work experience, positive workplace relationships, and raising aspirations for young care leavers will all go a long way to encourage and support young people.

Of particular note in the UK is their commitment to the Care Leaver Strategy, a statutory requirement for Local Authorities (LAs) to appoint a Virtual School Head and

promote educational achievement of Looked After Children (children in care) aged 16 and 17 preparing to leave care. LAs are also required to make it a priority to support young care leavers to remain in their placement until the end of the academic year (after their 18th birthday) to avoid potential disruption to learning during the vital end of term studies. Furthermore, there is an expressed commitment to ensuring that local authorities support young people to return to education and training up to the age of 25, and that the barriers to young people achieving their education and training goals should be identified and strategies to overcome these explored.

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**“Only a quarter of young people leaving care at 16 years of age remaining in education at 19 compared with 40% of young people who left at age 18 or over”**

In the UK, financial assistance is available to care leavers through the LAs to assist them to “set up home”. The allowance is £2000 (\$4153 AUD). There is also a “Fair Chance Fund” that provides payments to vulnerable young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to support their accommodation, education, and training needs. The interface between young care leavers and juvenile justice is an area where the UK system has focussed attention to support those with offending histories to access the necessary supports. The Ministry of Justice has appointed “Care Leaver Champions” to assist in this process.

Professor Stein stated that the Centre for Social Action through its initiatives has funded six organisations to provide a range of activities such as volunteering, mentoring and preparing younger care leavers, and providing creative and artistic activities. There are

also moves to collect more detail on care leavers' circumstances post 19 years of age. In addition, Professor Stein highlighted that the Department of Education (DFE) from September 2015 will collect and track progress regarding accommodation, education, and employment for those young people who leave care at 16 or 17 years of age when they reach the age of 18. These are great advances to ensure that meaningful data are collected that will facilitate effective decision-making and resource allocation in areas that offer the most benefit to care leavers.

The UK approach to supporting young people through the transition process is integrated across service systems, and sound research and evidence-based policy is pivotal to the system being effective and adequately resourced.

Dr Emily Munro is an international researcher and member of the Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood from Care (INTRAC). This world-wide network of researchers is concerned with the process of transition for young people in out-of-home care. Emily is also a pioneer of peer research and an advocate for the participation and inclusion of young people. When asked to identify the factors that she considered would influence success for young people transitioning from care, she volunteered the following:

- Making better use of the resources already available;
- Working more with families of origin (birth families); not limiting interactions / connection with families to one point in time; offering multiple opportunities over the life span;
- Providing a suite of meaningful service options; a one-size-fits-all approach does not work;
- Facilitating greater participation of young people and allow them choice wherever possible (for example allowing them a say in who will be the lead worker during the transition phase);
- Mobilising networks, and exploring available and potential supports more effectively;
- Moving away from reactive planning and plugging gaps, and plan and prepare for transition in a meaningful way;
- Moving away from an age-related service response to a needs lead, flexible service that recognises young people's agency;
- Doing with young people rather than to them;
- Focussing more on the positives, and success stories of young people leaving care to reduce the stigma that they face.

I headed to Bath University to meet with Dr Justin Rogers who has a keen interest in out-of-home care and care leavers. Justin provided an overview of the care system generally which set the context for our conversation. During this discussion, Justin raised an issue that affects all those in the care system, particularly young people transitioning from care, viz., the negative perception of the community towards "social work" and foster care.

Largely it is the media that shapes public perceptions, and the sensationalist stories that are portrayed relating to child abuse, coupled with the negative portrayal of the role that social workers play, create an impression of negativity for the public. Recent cases highlighted in the media focus heavily on laying blame directed at social workers often leading to disciplinary processes and dismissal. The culture of blame rather than accountability is not conducive to building public confidence in the system, nor is it for attracting potential students to study in the area of Social Work or keep existing workers in the field. There appears to be a different approach in Scotland where workers are supported and there is little engagement with the language of blame.

Where this environment of blame and shame exists, it directly impacts on the experiences and lives of children and young people – who are after all the victims and not responsible for why they are in care. The stigma attached to being in care can influence how young people feel about themselves, and also influences how others perceive them. Another area of concern for Dr Rogers was that siblings were often separated while in care. This concern is also an area of interest for the CREATE Foundation with a recently released a report *Sibling Placement and Contact in Out-of-Home Care* (McDowall, 2015) highlighting the prevalence and issues facing young people when separated from their siblings. Young people transitioning from care have a natural support when connected to their siblings and if the relationship is established prior to leaving care it should continue post care. Maintaining contact post care is pivotal to wellbeing, identity formation, and general support, and can also act as a safety net for those young people with older siblings.

Dr Rogers pointed me in the direction of a group of dedicated workers focussed on supporting and advocating for siblings. Subsequently, I met with Siblings United in London. An animated conversation regarding the importance of maintaining relationships with siblings while in care and where possible placing them together ensued; ideas were shared that sparked our collective interests. The "sibling camp" idea was one

### CASE STUDY 3

*Vicki was a gregarious 23 year-old young woman who was keen to share her story. The reason for this was because Vicki felt that not enough was done to recognise the issues that young people who have had a care experience go through when they leave care.*

*Vicki made it clear that she was not a victim and that she felt that she was doing "OK" in her life and did not want people to look down on her or think that she was special just because of her care experience.*

*Vicki was in care for about eight years and was separated from her brothers and sisters. She is happy that she has regular contact with them now (they are in two different foster care placements). This separation made it hard for them to connect regularly due to the foster carer's appointments and her "own" children's needs.*

*Vicki left her foster placement when she was about 19 years old. She felt she was ready. Her foster carer was supportive and allowed her to stay after she turned 18 despite not getting much financial support to do so. Vicki says that her Personal Advisor was reasonably helpful and well-meaning, but did not really understand the issues that Vicki came to face living by herself.*

*Overall, Vicki thought she was an independent, capable, and a strong person. She knew how to cook, clean, and look after herself. Budgeting was an area she was not great with, but she says her carer was helpful in that regard. What she did not realise was how lonely living by herself was going to be and how sitting in her flat by herself night after night was depressing. Vicki stated that she became "down" during this time and it was affecting her mood a lot. She felt like the fun had gone out of her life and that she was "grown up" too soon. Her feeling was that she had not much to look forward to.*

*When asked how her transition experience could have been improved, Vicki thought that she could have been better prepared for the isolation that she felt post care. It was not something she was prepared for. Vicki articulated that she realised how difficult it would be for the "system" to respond to this issue. However, she suggested that maybe mentors could be used. For example, another young person who had experience transitioning from care. She also highlighted the need for more opportunities to meet with young people in similar situations in small informal groups where they could talk about being emotionally ready to live alone and how they dealt with it. Vicki felt that this could be useful for others about to leave care.*

#### **CASE STUDY 4**

*Debbie presented as a shy withdrawn 20 year-old woman. She happily watched on as others participated in a group activity. When the activity was finished Debbie was quite forthright in making herself known and to voice her perceptions of the care system and share her experience. Debbie presented as a capable young woman and after her initial shyness exhibited a strong inner confidence and was remarkably articulate about her care experience.*

*Debbie was the eldest in her family, and had responsibility for protecting and also caring for her siblings. Debbie recalls that this was something she did instinctively. Debbie said that she remembered always being responsible for her siblings at a very young age and standing up to her mother when the children's needs were not being met.*

*When asked about her experiences of transitioning from care and in particular what she felt "went right" Debbie was very clear that maintaining contact with her siblings post the care experience was vitally important to her. She also identified that having living skills was important.*

*Due to a placement breakdown Debbie was placed in a temporary placement to assist her transition to independence. Debbie accessed a booklet that had practical information included and it contained skills she would need to have to live independently. She recalls that she went through a "tick box" exercise where she identified areas that required further development and those that she had mastered. She explained that the idea was for young people to provide the finished "tick box" document to their worker/carer. Workers would then assist the young person to access resources or assist them develop the required skills. Debbie felt that she was adequately prepared and required limited support from her worker.*

*Debbie stated that she felt confident in her abilities as she had been responsible for ensuring her siblings' needs were met in the past and as a result she felt adequately equipped to live by herself.*

that resonated with CREATE; a simple idea that could make a major difference in children and young people's lives. Reuniting siblings during a fun activity (at camp) is a great way to maintain, and in some cases initiate, contact between siblings who have been separated.

The impact for young people who are not placed with their siblings can be profound and the bond shared by siblings is unique and should be protected. The reality is that, in an over-burdened system where placement options are not always optimal, it sometimes is just not possible to keep siblings together. However, every effort in the short term should be made to maintain contact and facilitate connection between siblings, and longer-term planning to reunite siblings should be a priority.

For young people transitioning from care it was vitally important that they maintain established contact, or be connected to their siblings prior to leaving care as part of the exploration and mobilisation of their natural support networks.

Platform 89 is an organisation that provides consultancy services to help train workers, review, and evaluate good practice in local authorities. Platform 89 is often invited by local authorities to review their practice and provide feedback about what is going well and what needs improvement. Providing high level advice to local authorities on the standard of services provided to young people during the transition process is a key part of their role.

The strength of Platform 89 is that young people are trained and supported (and paid) to co facilitate their training and presentations. This gives several confident young people the opportunity to ensure that they are not pigeon-holed into a "professional care leaver" role.

From extensive experience, Platform 89 offered suggestions of "what works" for young people in the transition process (the success factors) which included:

- Be there for young people – this means caseworkers having the time to respond to their requests and listen to them;
- Encourage the formation of better relationships with caseworkers and service providers that reduce the power imbalance and recognise that young people are experts in their own lives;
- Provide better proactive planning – not reactionary;
- Work with the young person's networks and ensure that they are connected and current with supports that are available to them;
- Understand the important role that caseworkers

play in the young person's life, that the worker is a "significant other" for the young person;

- Ensure that training and support and good assessments are in place to determine that the young people are emotionally ready to live independently;
- Create safety and security – facilitate an open door approach– for young people to bounce back (safety net) when they need to;
- Set realistic expectations – promoting independence has a flip side and should be not over emphasised and used with caution; as adults we are often never completely independent, we rely on people and networks so young people in care should have the same expectation;
- Reduce the stigma associated with children and young people in care – utilise the media to promote positive news stories; this will work two-fold to assist young people in their journey post care and build their self-confidence and also attract workers to the out of home care/ child protection fields.

Hull was an area highlighted for its award winning work with young people transitioning from care. However, recent changes to funding and the implementation of a "systemic advocacy model" have had major impact on the ground. The loss of funding or reduced funding for some locally-based services that supported the transition process holistically was felt hard on the ground.

As is often the case, the funding withdrawal across the service system occurred prior to the new model and processes being established, which has affected the quality and quantity of services offered to young people. Workers advised that whilst there was merit in the new model, it had been introduced with limited consultation. Early reports from workers were that they felt the new model was more hierarchical and "top down" precluding effective decision making at grass-roots level. They explained that this was because the new system has been perceived as being more bureaucratic and causing more duplication. The impact of poor consultation is that "buy in" and acceptance by service users and workers is slower to occur. Managers reported that it was taking some time to embed, as many workers were sitting on the fringes not fully understanding (or accepting) the changes. This resistance was exacerbated, as the training to implement the new model had taken longer to roll out than expected.

Another consequence of the new model is that some highly successful initiatives were either withdrawn

or reduced. Managers reported that the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum was a particularly powerful initiative that started small with six local authorities involved and then grew across the country. Local authorities worked together to influence policy, legislation, and practice to improve the transition process for young care leavers. The coordination of this initiative is now being reviewed due to the withdrawal of funding.

Two workers provided some excellent feedback about “what works well” in the process of successfully supporting young people to transition from care to independence. Both felt that the monitoring and governance by the authorities was pivotal to ensuring that the system was accountable, and responsive to young people’s needs. Independent Review officers monitor case workers and ensure that young people have a leaving care/transition plan. Additionally, at national level, the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) audit local authorities to ensure compliance to policy and to ensure children and young people’s needs are met.

Workers reported that the following were the main “success factors” for young people to transition successfully:

**Support networks:** Should be identified during the planning phase to ensure that young people are “connected” before leaving care. This provides a safety net for them if things go wrong and also provides avenues for them to seek emotional and practical support.

- In Hull at the end of school, 17 year-olds do a residential (camp) to be connected to services post care. Provider staff are on hand to develop relationships with the young people so that post care they are familiar with, and have a better chance of connecting with the service to access further support if required. The aim is to create an environment for young people to feel safe and listened to.

**Housing:** Shared commitment by local housing authorities to provide young people with priority housing – not just in low income, poor neighbourhoods. Young people should not be able to be evicted without their worker or Personal Advisor being involved, and all other options explored. There is a need for a range of accommodation options to suit individual needs.

**Employment:** Connect young people to apprenticeships/traineeships; reimburse young people’s travel costs, outfitting and equipment;

support young people up to 21 and pay for multiple courses and training (not just a one off); consideration to extending support to young people up to 25 based on a needs assessment.

**Education:** Local authority pays for education costs and accommodation through a bursary of £2000; carers are supported to look after young people post 18 who remain in the placement (an allowance is paid if the young people come back or at the conclusion of the course).

**Emotional needs:** Prepare young people for the emotional effects of leaving care; young people in residential/group homes are often not equipped to live independently; life-skills training is essential for young people to reduce likelihood of homelessness; young people should not access public or independent housing until life-skills training is completed.

In a group discussion in Hull (UK), workers and young people identified that residential homes were not ideal for equipping young people to successfully live independently post care. It was a consensus that young people from residential care fared less well than those who had been placed in foster or kinship/family placements. For example, the group expressed concern that residential homes often created dependency in young people, as there was a focus on “activities” and entertainment rather than allowing some space for individuals to be self-directed and responsible for occupying their own time.

Many felt that the institutional environment where workers or specially trained staff prepared the meals was counter-productive, as young people were not encouraged to cook and prepare food themselves. They felt that this was because it was “easier” for staff, and it also obviated the risk of having young people in the kitchen. Young people particularly disliked having to ask for food, or access to cupboards for a snack, and felt that this was embarrassing and did not make them feel like they were valued or belonged.

Additionally, young people said that often the dynamic in the residential facilities was fuelled by strong personalities, and bullying was often rife. Furthermore they pointed out that the more forceful young people got what they wanted from workers and often played them off against one another (like parents). Overall the group expressed concern that the practice in residential homes needed to be reviewed and young people involved in the consultation to ensure that this form of care and housing option was effectively meeting the needs of young people.

### CASE STUDY 5

*Robert's story is one of courage and motivation. Robert presented as a confident 23 year-old man. He was very clear about what he wanted to do in his future and what he needed to do to get there. Robert felt that he had been better off in the care system, and that overall he had managed to have his needs met. Robert admitted there were the "not so good" times when he was unhappy but he overcame the challenges and was the stronger for it.*

*Robert lived in supported lodgings successfully during the transition phase and felt confident in his abilities to look after himself. Robert accessed supports provided by the local authority and had a good relationship with his Personal Advisor. He reported that he had stability with his workers and was very lucky as other young people have told him they have had many workers. Robert felt that it was important for young people to be resourceful and take responsibility for achieving their goals.*

*Finding permanent employment has been a challenge for Robert and he has accessed numerous training opportunities and done courses to improve his chances of employment, sometimes working several jobs at the same time to earn the equivalent of a full-time wage. Robert wants to be a Manager of a group home and is working towards this goal. He knows exactly what qualifications are required to do this, and is very motivated to achieve this goal stating that he "won't stop till he gets there".*

*Robert felt that what is important for young people leaving care is to be assisted more during the phase from supported lodgings to independence. He felt very much that he was "pushed" out after he was 21 and that the process felt rushed. He has not maintained relationships with workers post care.*



## **CASE STUDY 6**

*Ivan was a looked-after child and is now a worker whose role includes working with disadvantaged youth. Some of the young people he now works with are Looked After children and young people.*

*Ivan is 23 and has a strong commitment to young people and in helping them to help themselves. He feels that so many of the young people from disadvantaged backgrounds fall through the cracks and limit their potential. He believes that without support he could have taken the wrong (or more difficult) path which could have set him up to fail.*

*Ivan's view is that young people need strong support networks with family, friends, youth workers, caseworkers, and those in various agencies/ services providing support. Ivan's role is to explore support networks and create new ones that benefit young people and assist them in their journey to adulthood. He feels that sometimes young people's vulnerability is exacerbated by their environment and their lack of support networks. Ivan's own experience and that of his friends lead him to believe that young people access services differently from adults. He firmly believes that youth services should be accessible in a way that appeals to young people and they should be made to feel that they "matter" and that they are important to the group/activity/service that they are accessing. He strongly advocates that young people should be encouraged and supported to participate and provided with opportunities to have a say.*

*Ivan is a strong supporter of peer mentoring and stated that wherever this can happen, it should be encouraged and supported. Ivan feels that young people respond well to their peers and are often less daunted when young people are actively involved in the service. Ivan encourages organisations to consider utilising young people for co-facilitation of events and activities and in providing support for young people to be able to be more involved.*

*For young people transitioning from being Looked After to being independent, the essential thing is to ensure that they have established relationships with services, friends, and with positive role models (whether family or external). Young people also need safety nets so that when things go wrong "which they often do" they are able to link in with support to gain advice or additional services to help them.*

### **CASE STUDY 7**

*Cynthia is now 25 and has made a success of her life. She is happily married and has a stable job (for four years). Cynthia recalls her story candidly and says that she was “out there” and deliberately “broke down” her placements including her last one (during her transition phase). She reports that the carers were good people.*

*Cynthia wanted to live a carefree existence that involved drinking and partying and her carers were not supportive of this way of life. Despite breaking down the placement Cynthia reports that she now enjoys a good relationship with the carers and they came to her recent wedding and are an active part of her life. She says the re-connection was not immediate, and it took her a while for the relationship to reform and settle down.*

*When asked what could have made her transition to independence easier, Cynthia was at a loss to identify what the key aspects would be. It appeared from her account that she was growing up and acting out; she believed that this would have happened whether she was a child in care or not.*

*Cynthia is strong and resourceful and accessed supports external to those provided by the “system” and managed to get what she needed to live successfully.*

*She pursued a good education and is now a qualified worker in the welfare sector giving back to the community and utilising her skills to help others.*

### **CASE STUDY 8**

*Jenny, a 20 year-old woman, wanted to say that during her time with her carers she did not feel heard by them or her workers. Jenny was angry and vocal about how she felt “ignored”. Jenny’s major issue centred on the development of a plan for her move to independence.*

*Jenny stated that her carer and worker both believed that she was not ready to live independently when she turned 18. Jenny felt she was capable and was desperate to be on her own and out of the system. Jenny succumbed to the pressure to stay with her carer (whom she liked and had been with for eight years). She eventually moved into supported accommodation when she turned 20 and has enjoyed living by herself. She did not want to access the supports provided at the time but post care recognised that the supports were a safety net for her. She volunteered that on a couple of occasions she was able to call on a number of services for support (mainly around budgeting).*

*The transition process for Jenny, despite having to acquiesce to pressure to remain in the stable placement for longer than she wanted, was largely positive. Post care, Jenny could see that the social worker and her carer had cause for concern given her mental health issues, and it was probably in her best interest to follow the path that they were advocating for her to stay in care longer; but at the time she felt that they could have consulted and listened to her more. She felt that she was being “done to” and was manipulated in the decision making process.*

*Jenny felt that the transition process should be more geared towards hearing what the young person wants to do and supporting them to do it, rather than the social workers and carers thinking they know best.*

*Now Jenny lives by herself, holds down a part-time job and is studying to become a beautician.*



“Young people also need safety nets so that when things go wrong they are able to link in with support”



### 3.3 FRANCE

The French child protection system is complex in that it straddles two major authorities that are separate but complimentary. The majority of children in care are managed by the social services within local authorities, and the others are managed by the Judicial Juvenile Protection Department. Public debate about the efficacy of the child protection system and its efficiency and fairness led to the creation of the National Observatory for Children in Danger (ONED) in 2004. Essentially ONED is an oversight body with responsibility for the production of research on key aspects of child protection including transition from care (Gabriel, Keller, Bolter, Martin-Blachais, & Seraphin, 2013).

For over 30 years the French child welfare system has provided support to young people living within the out-of-home care system who come of age (at 18 years). Young adults are provided with funds to assist with educational or training costs that can include course fees, support to finish their studies, and driver's license attainment. Provision is made so that young people are able to stay at their residential placement or with their foster families if they wish to. Interestingly, Dumaret, Donati & Crost (2011) reported that after experiencing this high level of support, once the young people turn 21 they are unable to access welfare allowances that are only available from the age of 25 (unless the young adult is the head of a household). There is a heavy reliance on charitable organisations and local authorities to supplement and support young people during this welfare gap (between ages 21-25).

Youth unemployment is a major concern in France, and young care leavers are at higher risk. The most recent data show that unemployment is running at more than 22% amongst 15-24 year olds (Eurostat data cited in Lerch & Stein, 2010). It is estimated that young people without any real skills or without academic or technical diplomas will spend at least 1.5 years in their first three potential working year's unemployed. This is a particularly difficult situation given the lack of a welfare safety net to support young care leavers post care (Dumaret, 2008).

Little data are available to track the progress of young people transitioning from care, and even where data do exist it is not usually retained for longer than five to 10 years (Dumaret, 2008). Often researchers are resorting to utilising existing general population data and extracting from it. However, some data do exist within various government portfolios (such as education) that are useful.

Dumaret (2008) stated that research demonstrates that, compared with the general population (those of similar societal backgrounds and of the same age), the outcomes for young people with a care experience are surprisingly less negative than originally thought especially for those with stable placements. Older studies identify that young people in France experience similar outcomes to those in Australia, UK, and the Netherlands with challenges faced in acquiring housing and housing instability, coupled with increased mental health problems (Thoburn, 2007). There are also studies that highlight the difficulties adults experience in overcoming childhood adversities related to multiple family disturbances and repeated traumatic experiences (Dumaret, Coppel-Batsch, & Couraud, 1997).

Agency workers in a regional French organisation that were responsible for a group home met with me to share their experiences of the system and the supports it provides to young care leavers. All were professionally qualified workers who had extensive experience. They felt that the group home structure was effective and met the needs of many young people. They did, however, agree that group homes can be fraught with challenges given the structure and governance requirements. For example, one worker highlighted the often-rigid approach to routines such as meal preparation, access to the internet and bed times. These were often "blanket" rules applied to ensure the smooth running of the home rather than meeting the needs of individual young people.

**“Workers also agreed that young people were not necessarily provided with practical life skills such as how to cook, and wash their own clothes”**

Workers also agreed that young people were not necessarily provided with practical life skills such as how to cook, and wash their own clothes. This was mainly because of the risk associated with these activities. They all agreed that more could be done to make young people feel that they belonged to a household rather than living in a “facility”. They felt that the organisational structure and rostering of staff impacted on this.

Workers identified several actions that could lead to a young person's successful transitioning from care:

- Review how group homes operate; make them more like a home rather than an institution; allow young people to be involved in decision making;
- Provide practical living skills to young people before they transition;
- Connect young people with support networks (including connecting them with their siblings and other family members);
- Prepare young people to be independent; help them understand their responsibilities as an adult;
- Provide access to safe and reasonably priced housing;
- Help young people to understand the importance of education and assist them to reach their

goals; stress the importance of aiming high rather than taking the low options (i.e., settle for low paying jobs);

- Link young people to good role models who can help them when they leave care.

I also met with young people in a group; all had lived in residential units and were currently living in a local facility. Typically the facilities were small and offered support to about five young people in one location. The young people were largely happy in their environment, but all (without exception) relayed that they did not feel prepared to live independently. Most expressed a degree of trepidation about preparing to leave the security of the residential. However, the age range (15-17) would be a factor to consider as it would be reasonable for some of the young people not to have detailed plans in place at this stage for their transition out of the residential.

#### CASE STUDY 9

*Timeo (20 years old) was a natural larikin. He presented as a good natured, funny, and engaging young man. He reported that he had a pretty good transition from care and explained that, when he turned 19, he was ready for the move to independence. However, he had trouble convincing his long-term carers that he had the skills to do so. He managed to show his carers (eventually) that he could care for himself. He did not rely on, or expect support, from the authorities.*

*Timeo reports with good humour that he struggled at first in the domestic area (cooking and cleaning) and that his carer was available to help him with what he calls "his domestic disasters". He lives with another young person he met while working part-time in the local supermarket.*

*Timeo felt that he had succeeded in his journey to live independently because he was prepared, and did it gradually, and had the support of his carer. His advice to other care leavers was that they should do it at their own pace and each young person is different. He felt that creating expectations around time frames (or ages) was not conducive to a good outcome. He was very clear that each person is different and that if they are not ready to live independently then they should not have to.*

### **CASE STUDY 10**

*Softly spoken and articulate 22 year-old Lilou explained that her experience of being in care was traumatic for her. She had multiple placements, firstly with relatives, and then carers, and then an institution. She was separated from her brother when placed into her third foster-care placement as there was “no room” for them both and other placement options were not available. They are in contact now but have not lived together for 3 years.*

*Lilou is now living independently with friends in a small apartment in regional France. She recalls the challenges that she faced with good humour and relayed that she had learnt a lot about herself in the process. Lilou recalls that the most challenging thing about moving out to live by herself was the abrupt nature of the transition from the institution. She felt that she was “pushed” out without much care or attention.*

*She felt fortunate that she had good friends with whom she was able to negotiate to live in an established apartment. She has a bedroom she shares with another girl and access to a shared kitchen and lounge room. Liliou reports that she is happy and enjoys the company of her flat mates and feels supported by them.*

*Money is tight as she had not finished her education when she turned 18, and can only work part time to support herself while finishing her studies. However, she is enjoying the independence that this gives her and is learning about budgeting from her flat mates.*

*When asked what did make, or would have made her transition experience successful, Liliou found it hard at first to articulate the positive aspects. After a while she mentioned that what she had found helpful was the networks that she had established while at the institution and the friendships she developed with other young people in similar situations.*

*Liliou also stated that she valued the input and support of various workers at the institution who provided not only practical but emotional support to her in preparing to leave. Although she said that it was not really planned, it just happened as she had a good relationship with the worker. She felt that a more planned approach to support her prepare to leave the institution would have been very useful for her.*

#### **CASE STUDY 11**

*A group of young people sitting together enjoying a coffee in a small café in Paris – how idyllic! This is where I met Nina, a 22 year old who had been in the system for eight years before transitioning to independence when she was 19.*

*Nina had lived in two foster care placements, the first she described as a “failure”. She recalls that she was rebellious and rude to her carers and could see why they did not want to continue caring for her. She then went to live with an older couple and she felt that they had more experience in dealing with difficult foster kids and were more understanding. She stayed with them for six years and they were very supportive during her transition. However, she recalls that the authorities were not particularly helpful or responsive to her needs.*

*Nina had a child when she was 19 and now supports the child alone as the father left her when she was pregnant. Nina recalls feeling very alone and vulnerable during the transition period as she had a child to think of as well. Nina recalled that she was emotional and just could not face moving from her placement whilst pregnant, but wanted desperately to be independent. She negotiated with her carer to stay until the baby was born, and then she got assistance from an agency that supports young mothers, and they helped her find suitable accommodation and linked her in with other young mums.*

*A particular issue for Nina was the stigma, or as she called it negative feelings of others towards her, because she had a foster care experience and was also a young and single mother. She found that this made her depressed, and she felt badly about herself. She said that the authorities gave her a hard time when she was pregnant and warned her that she may not be able to keep the child as there were risks associated with her having a care experience. She reports that she was incredibly traumatised by this, and felt that for the first year after giving birth to her son that she was under scrutiny which left her feeling insecure as the authorities could come and take him at any time.*

*Nina thought that the transition process for her was made more challenging due to her pregnancy. She was aware that it was going to be difficult already to move out, without the added responsibility of caring for a child. Nina knows several other care leavers who have had children early, and they have now bonded and provide a support network for one another.*

*Nina continues to struggle to make ends meet financially and wants to move out into a regional area so that accommodation is cheaper. She realises that if she does this then her current support networks will be difficult to maintain and this she says “terrifies” her. She finds it difficult to access formal services as she feels staff look down on her. She prefers to find her own supports and links in with those she is comfortable with who don’t judge her.*

*Nina identified that what was needed to help young people transition successfully was more support services (that are not judgemental) tailored to their needs. Additionally, for young care leavers who are pregnant, that more sensitivity and support is required to ensure that they are able to parent effectively without being under increased pressure and living in fear of their own children being taken into care.*

# 4. conclusion

What became clear after speaking with researchers, workers, and young people was that there is no “magic” process, action, or plan that enables young people to transition successfully to adulthood. Each young person has individual needs shaped by their experiences of abuse and neglect, and then by the care system and this in turn shapes their needs post care. During the course of the interviews it became clear that young people primarily wanted to feel safe, loved, cared for, and to belong.

The policy framework and allocation of resources varied widely between the three countries visited. Moreover, the structure of support systems that aid and provide a safety net for young people are vastly different and are important to consider. However, their importance is not always evident in the opinions of young people about what is important to them during the transition process. This could be partly because they have an expectation of the services and have come to accept them as the norm. For example, in the UK young people are allocated a “Personal Advisor” who is specifically tasked with assisting the young person through the transition process. There are also financial incentives and supports that are able to be claimed in the UK, the Netherlands and France specifically to help young people “set up home” and provision to cover university and higher education costs. These things are often taken for granted as mentioned, as they are entitlements, and rightly so.

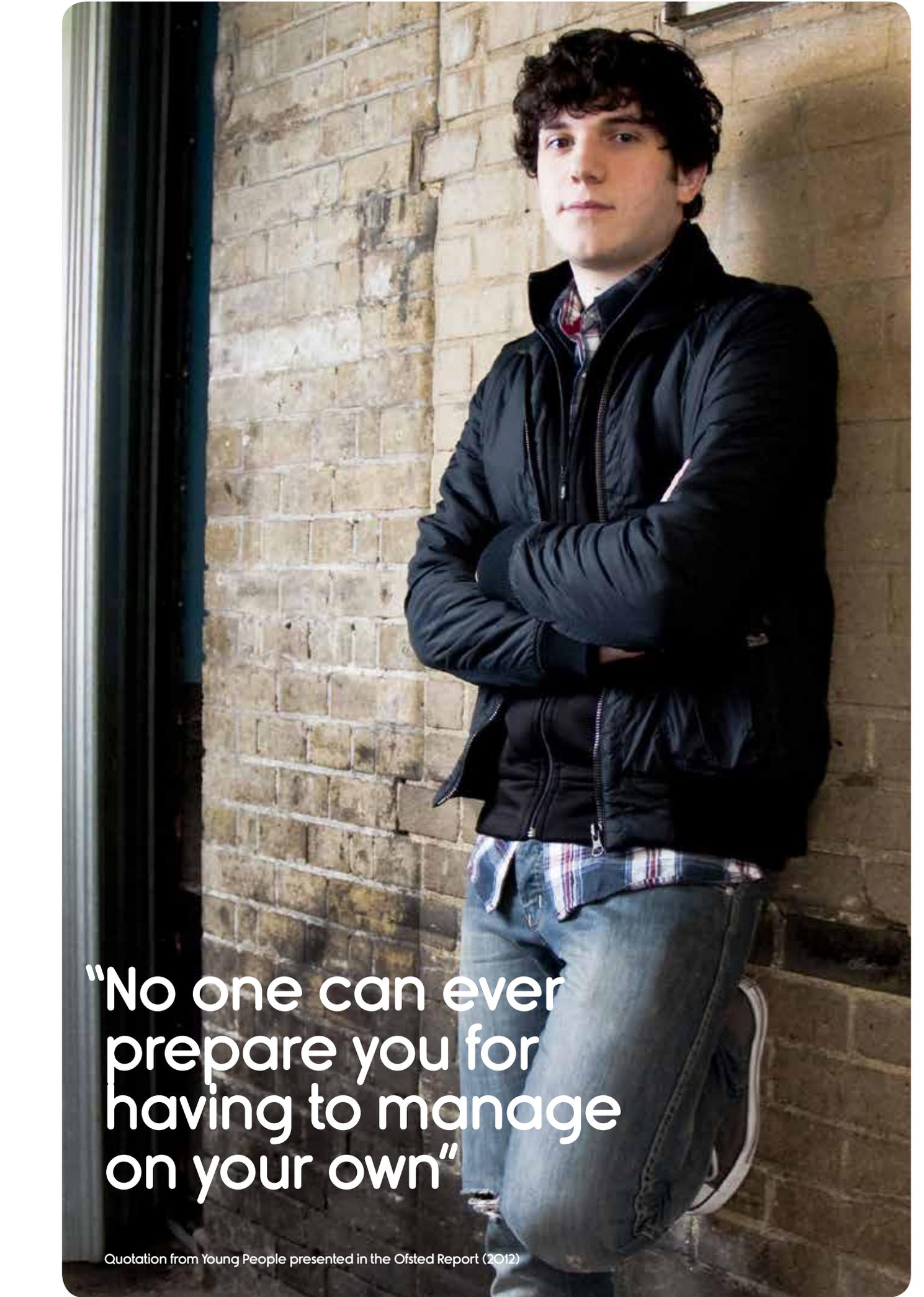
Bearing this in mind, it is therefore important to look at improving the lives of young care leavers with a dual focus. The first is the policy framework and the second is the humanistic aspect focussing on the individual.

In conclusion, young people’s transition from the care system to adulthood (post care) could be strengthened by viewing the process through a humanistic lens. For example, strengthening supportive relationships with

young people’s significant others (carers, case workers, birth family, siblings and community services), and using empowerment techniques to build self-confidence and resilience. If planning were optimum this could be achieved through a strong relationship with the worker and a tailored individual support plan that is developed with the young person. The desired outcome of an effective plan is that it needs to be flexible and “owned” by the young person. Such a plan, coupled with supporting the young person to develop coping and/or life skills, and a healthy sense of self, will go a long way towards assisting care leavers to transition successfully to adulthood.

Importantly in Australia we currently do not have adequate external monitoring that oversees the way in which the services to children and young people are administered. Largely it is when things go wrong and public pressure is applied that inquiries take place. This is not only reactive (and after the fact) but also expensive. In the UK there are internal Independent Reviewing Officers attached to local authorities that do not have case management responsibility who have oversight of monitoring individual cases to ensure that the best interests of the child are upheld. There is also Ofsted who conduct research into the effectiveness of the system including statistics and personal feedback from children and young people. This level of oversight is important as it acts as an impetus for local authorities to ensure that they are compliant and facilitating good practice.

There was much to learn from each of the three countries visited that could be applied in an Australian context to improve the system and better respond to the needs of young care leavers. These have been expressed in a variety of recommendations.



**"No one can ever  
prepare you for  
having to manage  
on your own"**

Quotation from Young People presented in the Ofsted Report (2012)

# 5. recommendations

## 5.1 STRUCTURAL/POLICY

1. Create a national oversight body to monitor child protection adherence to policy and good practice at local level.
2. Create specialist caseworker roles similar to the Personal Advisors in the UK. These workers would be responsible for ensuring that young people aged 15-18 are prioritised, and have an adequate preparation to transition from care to independence coupled with the specialist support they need. This also will help alleviate some of the workload for busy generalist caseworkers. These workers also will have responsibility for liaising with and supporting young people after they have left care.
3. Prioritise cross-portfolio collaboration (for dual clients). Juvenile Justice: Young offenders enabled to access specialist supports, including post-release services; Disabilities: Young people with disabilities assisted to access the right level of support and resources to meet their specific needs; Education: Increase financial support to provide educational incentives for young care leavers. This should include quarantined TAFE and University places, fee exemptions, and financial help with associated costs.
4. Increase the amount of financial assistance for young care leavers: The current Commonwealth TILA (Transition to Independent Living Allowance) at \$1,500 is insufficient to meet the needs of young care leavers setting up home post care.
5. Prioritise and fund the development of mentoring and peer support programs to assist young people in the transition process, and to act as a safety net when and if things go wrong post care.
6. Ensure that each young person has a leaving care plan and is involved in developing it. A holistic view of the young person's experiences, pre- and during care should be factored in.
7. Promote placement stability through resourcing and supporting foster carers to maintain placements with young people post 18 years.
8. Provide comprehensive training and support for carers to assist young people transition to independence.

## 5.2 INDIVIDUAL

1. Ensure that young people are connected to appropriate support networks including family of origin, siblings, support services, and mentors prior to leaving the care system.
2. Actively engage and encourage young people to become involved in the planning and decision-making process.
3. Improve communication between young people and workers/policy makers; young people must be consulted about the best way to communicate with them that informs them about the transition process and what entitlements they may have.
4. Provide innovative and effective life-skill training to equip young people to live independently; consideration needs to be given to young people living in regional/remote areas and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

# 6. actions

The manner in which the identified “success factors” and recommendations can be disseminated will include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Disseminating the report:
  - CREATE Foundation website
  - Over 12’s clubCREATE magazine (readership 5,000 members)
  - Social media – 3 key messages communicated through CREATE’s social media
  - Promoting through CREATE’s e-news to key stakeholders within Australia
- Promoting the key messages and findings to the sector during a workshop at CREATE’s international “Youth for Change” conference (Brisbane October 2-4);
- Advocating key messages and findings from the report to state jurisdictions and federal government through correspondence and meetings;
- Articulating the key messages and findings to CREATE’s young consultants through Youth Advisory Group meetings held within states/territories.

The recommendations will be developed into an advocacy strategy implemented by the CREATE Foundation at both national and state level. This report and its recommendations will shape an advocacy campaign that will be promoted to key decision makers including Ministers, Director-Generals, key policy and decision makers within government, and to our NGO partners.



# 7. quotes from young people

The quotations in Table 1 are from the Ofsted Report completed in the UK, and those in Table 2 are quotations from Australian young people included in CREATE Foundations latest Report Card (McDowall, 2013).

It is interesting to see that the comments are very similar and the views of young people appear to be similar despite their country of origin.

## 7.1 TABLE 1

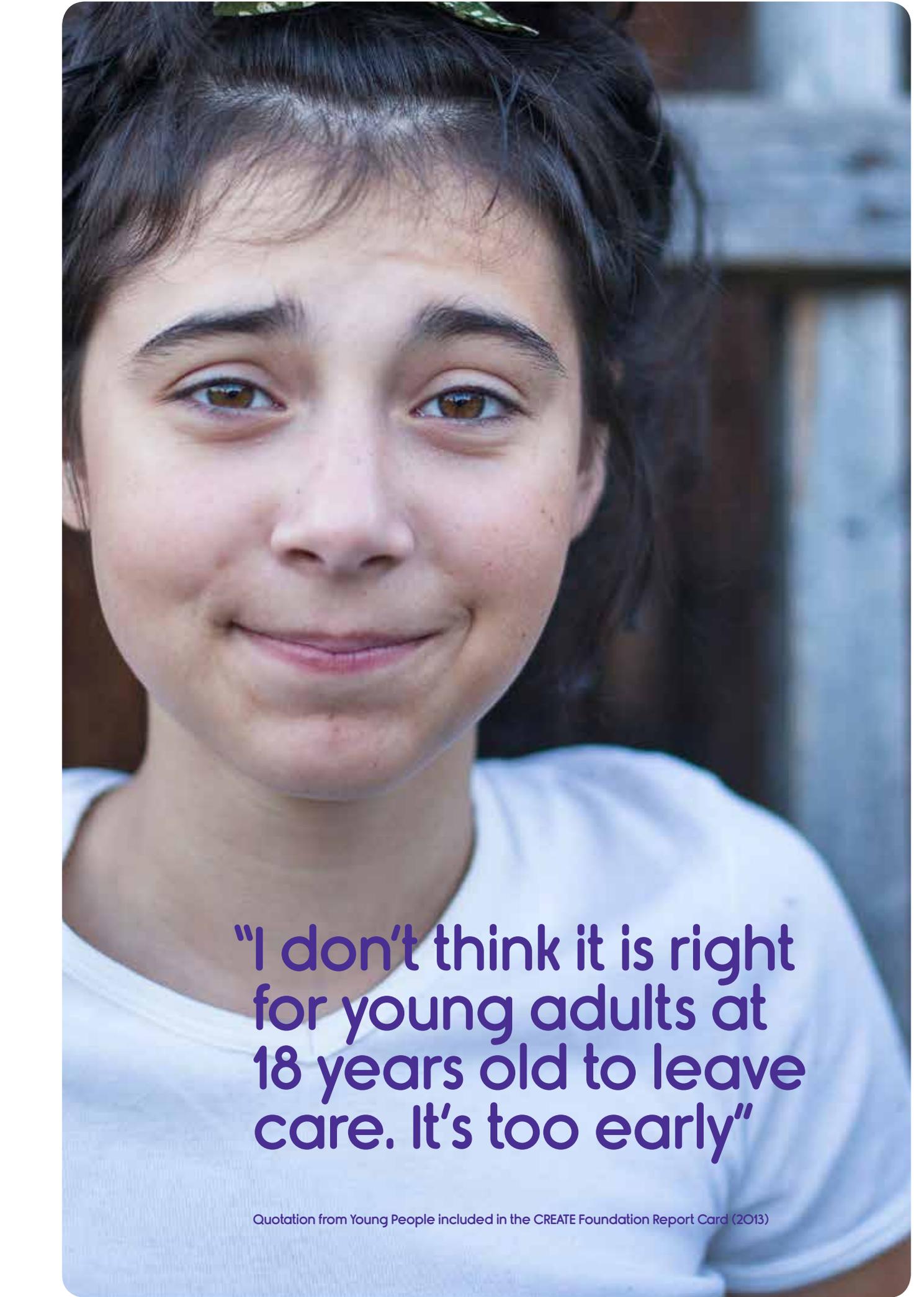
Quotations from Young People presented in the Ofsted Report (2012)

<i>"Young people need to be given more information about leaving care earlier on"</i>	<i>"I have no family contact now as no one kept me in touch with them as I was growing up"</i>
<i>"No one can ever prepare you for having to manage on your own"</i>	<i>"Loads of responsibilities – it's not normal for kids to shop/pay bills and live alone at 18"</i>
<i>"Before you leave you should have three or four weeks of independence, to get a taster – given a certain amount of money and monitored. Given a trial period and a bit of assessment"</i>	<i>"When you're in care you don't have to worry about bills and cooking or meals. All of a sudden when you leave it's harder to manage and it stresses you out"</i>
<i>"16/17 is too young for independent living"</i>	<i>"Financial support is really important, like advice on budgeting. I had, over a period of time, gone shopping under a worker's supervision to make sure I was buying the right things. This had worked well and got me used to managing money"</i>
<i>"It's only when you get in the flat that you find out what things cost, such as TV licence and broadband"</i>	<i>"It's a sense of achievement – finally leaving and finding out who you are"</i>
<i>"When I was in care I had a lot done for me. I was spoilt and it has been a shock for me when I left care"</i>	<i>"As a 16 year – old I have gone from a children's home to a women's refuge – have gone from having lots of support to none at all"</i>
<i>"I had my own place and wasn't coping, but now am in supported housing which is really good cos always someone around to ask for support"</i>	<i>"You should have the option to stay in foster care if you want to stay"</i>

## 7.2 TABLE 2

Quotations by Young People Included in the CREATE Foundation Report Card (2013)

<i>"I like it in care and wasn't really taught how to live in the big world, and I've finally got a family. It's scary to even think about leaving them"</i>	<i>"Being on my own and being able to financially support myself. Don't want to go downhill in school"</i>
<i>"I am going to be lonely and that people won't care anymore"</i>	<i>"I don't want to leave care because I am happy where I am"</i>
<i>"I don't know what is going to happen to me, and I don't think it is right for young adults at 18 years old to leave care. I think it's too early"</i>	<i>"Most other kids my age have their parents to fall back on if they need some money help like with getting a house, and I don't have that. If I got a house and for some reason had to leave, like a housemate move out and I couldn't afford it"</i>
<i>"Just feel kind of scared, because it's a first time and it's another step for me moving into the real world"</i>	



**"I don't think it is right  
for young adults at  
18 years old to leave  
care. It's too early"**

Quotation from Young People included in the CREATE Foundation Report Card (2013)

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“Just feel kind of scared, because it’s a first time and it’s another step for me moving into the real world”

Quotation from Young People included in the CREATE Foundation Report Card (2013)

# 9. churchill blog



Baggage checked subject to  
Tariff, including limitations of  
liability therein contained



By *Jacqui*



Hello everyone,

*I have arrived safely in Amsterdam after a very long plane trip (23 hours). The weather here is so cold compared to Queensland and the top temperature today was only 7 degrees! I have had to get some gloves and a scarf to keep warm. On my first day I visited a small country called Belgium and I learnt that their national language used to be French but now they speak Dutch, French AND German.*

*I headed out to a place called Keukenhof about 45 minutes outside of Amsterdam today to visit the tulip gardens, which was truly amazing. I hope you like the photo of what I think are the world's biggest Clogs!*

*Interesting fact – Did you know that the Belgians invented French fries? Belgian journalist Jo Gérard claims that a 1781 family manuscript recounts that potatoes were deep-fried prior to 1680 in the Meuse valley, in what was then the Spanish Netherlands (present-day Belgium) and did you know that they have them with mayonnaise?*

*Tomorrow I head out to the University of Groningen to meet two amazing researchers who specialise in out-of-home care. I am looking forward to hearing about how they see their transition system and learn more about how they support young people in the Netherlands.*

Bye for now!

*Jacqui*





Hi All,

Here is the next instalment from my Churchill Fellowship trip for you to enjoy.

### GRONINGEN – THE NETHERLANDS

I met with two amazing researchers in Groningen – Dr Monica Lopez and Dr Annamiek Harder. Annamiek specialises in research relating to residential care and shared with me some of her insights about the Dutch system. One interesting fact is that young people in the Netherlands can access support until they are 23 years old. Dr Lopez has experience of the Spanish care system and provided her perspective of their system. In Spain young people are predominantly cared for by larger church/charity organisations in larger type institutional care. This is highly problematic and much research is needed to promote the benefits of family – based care.

Groningen was an interesting place with a rich history as a university town. Everywhere you looked there were young people on bikes, there were more bikes than cars! It was very chilly in Groningen and after a day of meetings I headed back to the hotel to the sanctuary of the lovely lobby and fire!

I managed to speak to a young person “Mary” who was truly amazing and gave me some very useful information about her transition experience which was largely positive.

Whilst in the Netherlands, we also got to visit the Anne Frank House or in Dutch the Anne Frank ‘Huis’. Anne Frank was amazing young girl who was Jewish, and lived during the Second World War and was incredibly brave whilst hiding with her family in Amsterdam. I had the privilege of visiting the historical building where she was in hiding and brought a copy of her diary. Inspirational!

### LONDON UK

Well the temperature was a balmy 11 degrees when we landed in London! To get my bearings I hopped on one of the tour buses “hop on and hop off” – a great way to

see the sights and also find your way around. Visiting London is like playing Monopoly – I saw Pall Mall, Euston Station, Park Lane and the list goes on. I also managed to see the changing of the guards outside of Buckingham Palace which was a very colourful spectacle despite the rain and wind!

Did you know that one of the English food specialties is battered fish and chips – it is served with “mushy” peas – I’ve had a taste and it’s pretty yummy once you get over the look of the peas ha ha!

Today I visited the Churchill Trust to meet the Director General Jamie Balfour and hear about the UK Trust and the 50th Birthday celebrations planned for this year. I also met with a wonderful researcher Dr Emily Munro (who came to our conference last time to present). Emily has done a lot of research in the area of transitioning from care and is also doing a chapter in a book edited by Philip Mendes along with Joseph McDowall our Executive Director Research. It was wonderful to hear Emily’s experience of the care system and to pick her brains into what she considers are the factors that influence success for young people transitioning from care.

Did you know that in London they have what they call “rhyming slang” which is a language developed by cockney’s (who are Londoners) – see what you think;

Apples and Pears is Cockney slang for Stairs  
Butcher’s Hook is Cockney slang for Look.  
Adam and Eve is Cockney slang for Believe

I head off to interview the UK guru of transitioning (research) Mike Stein tomorrow and then an agency – followed by a long train trip to Bath to meet with staff from the University and some amazing young people!

Signing off for now,

Jacqui



Hi again!

### LEEDS

We took the long trek from London to Leeds today and we were up at 5:30am to get to the station. Had a wonderful meeting with Julie and Belinda from 'Platform 89', a great service providing training and support to workers in the out-of-home care field in the UK. We enjoyed a long conversation and are very hopeful that Belinda (who is an Aussie) and Julie will make it out to our Youth for Change conference in October!

Here are some happy snaps of us working on the train!

### BATH

Another freezing (but Qld standards) day, complete with rain! Today I met with Dr Justin Rogers from Bath University. Justin's research interests are very much aligned with a lot of the work we are doing at CREATE especially around transitioning from care and sibling contact. It was great to hear his views of the care system from a practice and research perspective. I hope that we will work with Justin in the future and will eagerly await his next research project!

I had morning tea at the oldest tea house in Bath called "Sally Lunn's" and had what they call a "cream tea" which is fresh scones with jam and clotted (very thick) cream. We then visited the "Wookey Hole" caves which are amazing caves in the Somerset countryside. There were many attractions at the caves and I got to meet Paddington Bear!

Here are some more photos.

Until next time,

Jacqui





*Hello again!*

*I returned to Hull to visit with the young people from Freedom Road, a creative arts group. Some of you may remember Freedom Road visiting Australia for our first ever Summit in Sydney.*

*We were treated to a performance by a group of young people who sang and played guitar accompanied by Ian and Lisa. We shared a lunch of delicious pizza and I got to catch up with young people who came out to Australia for the Summit which was really great. I also got to meet young people with a care experience and hear their stories. I am amazed at their resilience and ability to transcend adversity to become such strong and capable young people post care. It was a highlight of my trip so far.*

*I met a cab driver who shared with us his recipe for "Yorkshire Pudding" a delicacy created in this part of England that is eaten with the traditional Sunday Roast. Yorkshire puddings are like pastry that is really light and fluffy and is served best with lots of gravy (like in this photo).*

*His recipe is as follows:  
Heat oven to 220 degrees (180 fan forced)  
Grease/oil muffin tray and place in oven until very hot  
Mix in blender: 2 cups plain flour, 2 cups of milk and 2 eggs  
Pour mixture into piping hot muffin tins, fill to the top  
Put muffin tray filled with mixture into the oven for 12 to 15 mins*

*Later on, I met with Ian, Kay, Craig and Sarah for dinner and had a wonderful meal and learned a lot about the English "Looked After Children" system and the current issues facing young people.*

*On Easter Sunday we took a look around the city of Hull and visited "Old Town" which is very quaint and filled with amazing history.*

*Our next meeting was with two young people, Chiquita and Jess, who met with us for coffee and we visited the Transport Museum. The museum was a great venue filled with interesting historical artifacts – old tram cars, vehicles and bicycles. It was great to see the girls and catch up with them (they had been out with Freedom Road to Australia for our Summit). We hope to see Jess in Oz in the near future as she is planning a visit!*

*To say thanks to the young people I took some Aussie souvenirs – have a look at Ian and I in our tragic hats (complete with corks!)*

*After visiting old town we took a ride out to the Humber Bridge and remarkably the sun was out and we got some great pictures.*

*Until next time, I will leave you with a photo of my random Transformer sighting!*

*Jacqui*



Hi All!

After a mishap with our meeting location we got to meet with Professor Mike Stein. Mike is seen throughout the UK as the “guru” of transitioning from care. It was such a privilege to meet with Mike and hear about the system in the UK and gain first-hand knowledge about the latest statistics and their interpretation. Mike has been instrumental in the UK for keeping transitioning on the agenda for governments. Over the years there has been significant investment and increased understanding of the needs of young people. We are trying to entice Mike to Australia for one of our conferences and to share his wisdom so we can learn from the UK experiences.

We left Leeds and headed to Edinburgh today. The city is gorgeous and as we walked down the streets there were bagpipes playing!

The apartment is right across the road from Edinburgh castle and I write this blog, sitting on the window seat gazing out of the window from time to time!

Tomorrow its off to the BASPCAN conference in the afternoon after a visit to the castle in the morning!

Until then,

Jacqui

Hello again,

Today despite the very chilly weather and rain I made my way to Edinburgh Castle – high on the hill. It was an amazing view and the castle is steeped in history. Finding our way to the hop on and hop off bus was the best move. Nice and warm, free of rain and wonderful commentary about the local sights.

One of the moving stories is about Greyfriars Bobby – A little dog who was so loyal to its owner that when the owner died little “Bobby” sat by the grave all day and he went to the local shops / butchers to get scraps to live off. When Bobby passed away they decided to make a statue of him which is pride of place outside of the old pub named after him. You’ll notice that the statue has a very shiny nose – its tradition for tourists/locals to rub Bobby’s nose for good luck. What a great story!

The BASPCAN conference started in the afternoon and I got to hear a great range of speakers including an amazing woman with a care history who has written some compelling poetry and recited it for everyone. I met her after the plenary and she graciously signed a copy of her book for me which I will share with everyone when I return. She also agreed that we could share the poems at our conference!

There were a number of influential researchers and presenters from Australia which was great to see – we caught up with Caroline Carrol from Open Places (Forgotten Australians), Stella Conroy from Families Australia, Prof Bob Lonne from QUT, Dr Fiona Arney from Uni SA – Australian Centre for Child Protection. There are others that were not there today so hopefully tomorrow we can catch up. So, day one of the conference was a success and I am looking forward to tomorrow.

Thanks for reading,

Jacqui



Hi all!

Today we made the long journey on the train from Edinburgh to London and the weather was glorious for most of the trip! This afternoon we met with a group called "Siblings United". We had a long chat with an English afternoon tea to keep us energised.

This group are highly motivated and committed to ensuring that as much as possible, siblings are placed together or at the very least if they are separated that they maintain quality and regular contact. Joseph was able to share the findings of our own research (currently nearing final edit for printing). It was a lively discussion, and it seems we share similar concerns about the need for siblings to be together where possible. Their angle is that it is a basic right for children and young people. They also provide a fabulous program where they bring CYP together on "sibling camps" – I am very interested in this and will be getting more information to share with the team when I am back.

I was presented with a fab t-shirt and commemorative mug from their founder William Williams.

We are very hopeful of sharing our research and findings with the view of bringing international attention to this issue. A huge thanks to Dr Mariya Ali, Chris Crooks (Sibling United team leader) and Rebecca Barnard a co-researcher and communications specialist.

Until my next installment,

*Jacqui*

P.S. We went for a walk after our great meeting with siblings united and walked through Kensington Park. We saw the Peter Pan statue and a very cute furry creature!





*Hello from London!*

*Today I went to Shakespeare's Globe Theatre at the London Embankment – it was a wonderful experience to see the replica theatre with open roof and authentic building materials. They were preparing for a production of "the Merchant of Venice" so we got to see the sets being put up. I also saw an old boat called "the Golden Hinde" – a remarkable boat when you think of the journey that it undertook on the high seas.*

*The day was enhanced by finding a brilliant coffee shop with the best coffee yet, we complimented the barista and he told us that the shop was owned by an Australian – we laughed out loud!*

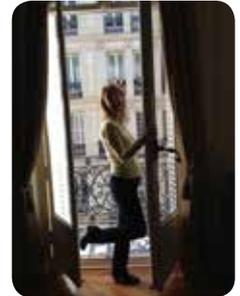
### LONDON – CAMBRIDGE

*Well what a great last day in the UK. We caught the tube (two changes) and then the train to Cambridge and a 25 minute walk into town. We did a tour of St Johns College which was amazing with superb grounds. The whole town is steeped in history and filled with quaint shops and lots of book shops. I got to speak with a young person who was doing very well despite a harrowing history, it was so great getting to hear the stories as I travelled around the country.*

*Off to Paris now for the next leg of the adventure!*

*Jacqui*





Today was an amazing day. Paris is a very large city and quite a challenge to get to everything by foot, so I got on one of the tourist hop on and off buses and headed on a loop to see the sights. What a truly picturesque city Paris is. There is so much to see and I had my first glimpse of the Eiffel Tower (OMG!). As many of you would know I am very scared of heights but I could not come to Paris and not go up on the lift within the Eiffel Tower – after trembling legs and a slight meltdown in the lift I got safely to a seat – VICTORY!

Remarkably as I was walking along the Champs Elysees we saw the offices of King, Wood Mallesons our wonderful company lawyers, I couldn't resist a photo!

I also visited the Winston Churchill memorial statue and had my photo taken there. I am off to see the special exhibition they are showing for Churchill and De Gaulle in the next day or so.

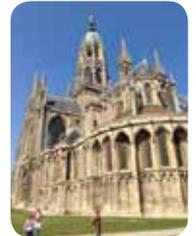
Sir Winston Leonard Spencer-Churchill, was a British politician who was the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1940 to 1945 and again from 1951 to 1955.

Charles André Joseph Marie de Gaulle was a French general, resistant, writer and statesman. He was the leader of Free France and the head of the Provisional Government of the French Republic.

It was a great day also as my contacts from agencies in Paris have organised for me to meet with young people – they are holding an activity and have agreed to speak to me (and there should be about 15 young people). I am very much looking forward to that. Today I also found out that two of our contacts/colleagues from the UK (Siblings United and Platform 89) are coming out to our Youth for Change Conference which is unbelievable and I am so looking forward to meeting with them again! They will have so much to share and I know that their perspective will help us immensely to be able to find more ways to support young people. HOORAH!

Until my next installment,

*Jacqui*



*Hello again!*

*I headed out of Paris today to a place called Mt St Michelle. An incredible monastery build high on top of a rock. It was an amazing place and it was a challenge to climb 350 steps to get up to the Church...*

*I was completely pooped when I got to the top but the view was worth it!*

*What a fabulous few days in Paris. I had the good fortune to meet with an amazing young woman and hear her story and learn about the French system works for kids here. She was very positive about her experiences and we had a great chat (her English was amazing!) over a croissant and coffee.*

*I then headed to an activity about 2 hours out of Paris in a town called Bayeaux – an agency (residential) was holding an activity for the kids to see the Bayeux Tapestry which is the oldest tapestry in Europe going back to the 10th Century. The worker met me at a central location*

*and you won't believe it, but it was outside the Churchill Hotel – remarkable coincidence. We headed to the park where about 10 young people were having lunch after visiting the tapestry. They chatted about their experiences freely – but many did not speak English and my French is just about non-existent so we made to with lots of smiles, gestures and broken English/French. There were about four young people who were able to communicate in English and I spoke with them for a short time and learnt far more than I have done by reading the literature! The words of children and young people are wise!!!!*

*Bayeaux was a gorgeous little town that had lots of cobble stone streets, and great places to eat – cop a look at my crepe- salted toffee and roasted almonds – soooo good!*

*Jacqui*





Hi again!

France is a fascinating country and Paris is quite overwhelming when you consider the breadth of amazing history here and the fabulous museums, art galleries, and architecture to look at! The shopping is window shopping only as this is a “designer label” town – I saw a great handbag with a €10,000 Euro price tag!

I met four young people this week and they were great fun. We got on like a house on fire and they shared their stories with good humour and positivism. The workers that supported the young people were so happy and very engaged with the young people. They had decided to give me a gift for speaking to them, and brought me a beret (traditional French cap). The beret (usually black) was once considered the national cap of France and is part of the stereotypical image of the French. It is no longer as

widely worn as it once was, but it remains a strong sign of local identity in the southwest of France. The young people (particularly Timeo) teased me a lot about my poor pronunciation of French words (which I have to say is rather dismal).

Today, after my last interview with Nina (who very graciously met with me before her shift at work) I headed to a small town called Givenchy to see Monet’s Garden. It was breathtakingly beautiful and the tulips (my personal favourite flowers) were in full bloom. Have a look at the gorgeous colours!

Thanks for reading!

Jacqui



**“There was much to learn from each of the three countries visited that could be applied in an Australian context”**





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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.