

Extending Placement Support

Perspectives of young people with an
Out-of-home care experience

“This is my family and I love them & they love me”

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About CREATE

CREATE Foundation is the national peak consumer body for children and young people with an out-of-home care experience. We represent the voices of over 45,000 children and young people currently in care, and those who have transitioned from care up to the age of 25.

Our vision is that all children and young people with a care experience reach their full potential.

Our mission is to create a better life for children and young people in care.

To do this we:

- **CONNECT** children and young people to each other, CREATE and their community *to*
- **EMPOWER** children and young people to build self-confidence, self-esteem, and skills that enable them to have a voice and be heard *to*
- **CHANGE** the care system, in consultation with children and young people, through advocacy to improve policies, practices and services and increase community awareness.

We achieve our mission by facilitating a variety of programs and services for children and young people in care and developing policy and research to advocate for a better care system.

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Introduction

This consultation sought to connect with young people in care about their thoughts concerning the option to access placement support until 21 years.. This consultation was developed in collaboration with the South Australian Department of Child Protection.

The *Stability in Foster Care* initiative was implemented in 2018, and reimburses home-based foster and kinship carers to remain caring for young people, until they turn 21 or the young person no longer meets eligibility requirements (e.g. when they earn a certain level of income). Such an initiative is a step in the right direction to mitigating some of the adverse outcomes experienced by many young people leaving care, although does not yet extend to young people in residential care.

In their paper, Campo and Commerford (2016) summarised various reports, highlighting that young people who are leaving the Out-of-Home care (OOHC) system are more likely to find themselves homeless/experiencing unstable housing, unemployment/underemployment, experiencing mental illness, low educational attainment and the challenge of substance abuse issues, compared to their peers who have not experienced the OOHC system. Previous CREATE research supports these findings: a third experience homelessness within the first year of leaving care, while 46% of males have contact with the justice system (McDowall, 2009).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009) highlights 47.2% of young adults between 20-24 years are either still living at home or have returned home, and young people in care should be provided with the same opportunity as their peers. Additionally, the research suggests the significant positive impact on young people who have the optional leaving care age increased to 21. A report commissioned by Anglicare Victoria summaries the following key findings from the cost benefit modelling (Deloitte Access Economics, 2016):

- The probability of homelessness is halved, from 39% down to 19.5%;
- The probability of pursuing further education is increased, from 3.6% to 9%;
- The probability of arrests is down from 16.3% to 10.4%;
- The probability of hospitalisation is decreased, from 29.2% to 19.2%; and
- The probability of alcohol or drug dependence is decreased, from 15.8% to 2.5%.

While previous research supports the benefits of extending care to 21, it is important to directly consult with children and young people and gain their opinions, and hear how willing they are to take up the extended supported placement option. This consultation aimed to hear young people's views of transitioning from OOHC, including comment on the impact and potential challenges of extending the leaving care age.

Method

Participants

CREATE conducted interviews and online surveys with 25 young people with a care experience in SA, aged between 15-19 years. Full demographics are detailed in the table below.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Demographic	Number of Young People
Age	
15	7
16	5
17	7
18	4
19	2
Gender	
Male	9
Female	15
Non-Binary	1
Culture	
Aboriginal	7
Maori	2
Anglo-Australian	16
Disability	
Yes	6
No	18
Prefer not to say	1

Procedure

The consultation was conducted in accordance with the CREATE Consultation with Children and Young People and Disclosure Policies. Informed consent was obtained from all young people, and carers or caseworkers signed consent forms on behalf of young people 17 years and younger, or verbal consent was recorded where participants completed the consultation over the phone. All participants were provided with an Information Sheet detailing the nature of the consultation and informing young people that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. In recognition of the time and effort provided by young people for the consultation, each participant was provided with a \$25 gift voucher. Young people answered the consultation questions over the phone with a CREATE staff member, at the CREATE office or they completed the survey online through Survey Monkey. The quotes in this

document have been taken directly from the voices of children and young people with a care experience. In order to protect the identities of the young people involved, attributions of the quotes.

Findings

Where are young people living now and where are they going next?

A third of the participants lived in a kinship placement (n = 8), and six were living with foster carers. A further six were already independent, while three were in a residential facility (refer to Table 2).

Table 2. Current Placement Type

Placement Type	Number of Young People
Foster Care	6
Residential Care	3
Kinship Care	8
Permanent Care	2
Independent Living	6
TOTAL	25

When asked who they had spoken to about what will happen when they leave their placement, 12 young people stated that they had spoken with their case worker and 10 young people reported that they had spoken with their foster or kinship carer (refer to Table 3).

Table 3. Who has spoken to you about what will happen in your placement?

Source of information	Number of Young People
No one	7
Caseworker	12
Foster Carer	6
Kinship Carer	4
Friends	2
Other	3
TOTAL	25

Given that the final standard from the *Australian National Standards for Out-of-Home Care* specifies that all young people 15 years and older must have a leaving care plan detailing supports for successful transition from care, it is concerning that seven young people completing this survey had not spoken to anyone about what would happen after they turn 18 (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2011). This lack of communication and planning regarding

their leaving care plans may explain the finding that 8 young people were unsure of where they would live post their 18 birthday (see table below).

Table 4. Where are you planning to live after orders cease when you turn 18 years?

Location	Number of Young People
Unsure	8
Foster Carer	3
Kinship Carer	3
Partner	3
Residential	1
Relatives	1
Friends	1
Renting (Alone)	3
Renting (Shared)	1
Public Housing	1
TOTAL	25

Two participants commented that they had spoken to friends about leaving care. The reliance on social supports and informal networks to provide information and accommodation appears when asked where they are planning to live upon leaving care. Six young people stated they would live with friends, a partner, relatives, or in shared housing.

Only one young person was considering public housing. However, when asked later in the survey how likely it would be for them to have applied for public housing, three young people said ‘very likely’ by the time they turned 18 and eight said ‘very likely’ by the time they had turned 21, indicating it was still an option they were considering but had not necessarily decided upon.

Life with current carer/placement and beyond

A large number of young people (n=16) said that they would be ‘very likely’ or ‘quite likely’ to take the option to live with their current carer after turning 18. This is an increase from the seven responses from young people before they were aware that an option does exist to stay with current foster and kinship carers. Some young people however reported they would not want to stay with their current carer, and this was particularly the case for participants who were already living independently.

Table 5. If you could stay with your current carer after you turn 18, how likely would you be to take that option?

Confidence	Number of Young People
Very Likely	13
Quite Likely	3
Reasonably Likely	1
Somewhat Likely	2
A little Likely	2
Not at all likely	4
TOTAL	25

When describing the reasons for wanting to continue living with their current carer, young people reflected on reliability, safety, stability, additional general support, educational help and financial assistance as being significant positive factors, particularly as many considered themselves as ready to be independent.

“Stability that it provides me at the moment and having that family dynamic.” (Male, 17 years)

“I think that being able to finish my studies and save a little bit of money, I would have financial stability to move out. Extra skills that I would learn.” (Female, 17 years)

“Financial reasons. Being able to have enough money to move out and live.” (Male, 15 years)

“Because if I haven't quite figured out what I would like to do after school or where I'll live, I can stay with my carers until I'm ready move.” (Female, 16)

“I was not ready to leave my siblings and my residential care with no support.” (Female, 19 years)

A number also commented that they felt a sense of family connection, a sense of home and their placement was where they could go when life didn't go to plan.

“Because she's mum to me, its home, and I feel very safe there.” (Female, 17 years)

“Because I know they can help me when needed. Also they have cared for me basically my whole life, and I know that I can rely on having a place to stay when here.” (Female, 16 years)

“She's always been there for me and never let me down. She loves and cares for me. She's my Nan, so why wouldn't I?” (Male, 15 years)

“Because I know I can rely on having a safe and caring place to stay, and I know I can trust the people I'm living with at the moment. I know the people I'm living with at the moment would also have me again, as long as things are going to plan.” (Female, 16 years)

“Everything. I am going to trade school; I have a car that my foster carers bought for me. This is my family.” (Male, 17 years)

The challenges of staying at their current placements were also addressed, with young people commenting that there may be difficulties in following the rules of the placement while trying to

develop into an independent adult. Another young person cited conflict and “not seeing eye to eye” with carers as a motivator to move out at 18 years of age. Three young people suggested that paying rent/board in their current placement may be a challenge.

“A lot of rules and not enough freedom.” (Non-binary, 16 years)

“Possibly paying board, depending on how much they would like me to pay.” (Female, 16 years)

“I think being an adult and still having the rules of a child would be challenging.” (Female, 17 years)

“Not getting along.” (Male, 18 years)

When considering the best strategies to deal with the challenges of living in their current home, young people reflected having a transition plan, a good connection with case worker/support worker and financial stability would be helpful.

“My case worker. She helps me with all my struggles and if I have any questions. Having a good relationship with her also helps.” (Female, 17 years)

“Outside support. I had eight social workers and was not confident with any of them.” (Male, 18 years)

“A proper transition plan and support once transitioned.” (Female, 19 years)

“Getting a job and being able to afford stuff and to pay rent.” (Male, 15 years)

Independent life skills and goals in young adult life

Several questions were asked to gauge young people’s confidence about life skills and achieving goals in their adult life. Generally, young people were confident they had at least some skills to live independently with nine young people rating themselves as “quite” and “very” confident, and 10 rating themselves as “somewhat” or “reasonably”. However, four young people said they were not at all confident.

Table 6. How confident do you feel now about having the life skills you need to live independently?

Confidence	Number of Young People
Very Confident	5
Quite Confident	4
Reasonably Confident	7
Somewhat Confident	3
Little Confident	1
Not at all Confident	4
Did not answer	1
TOTAL	25

When asked what might assist in increasing their confidence, what emerged strongly was the need for more support and knowledge about what to expect when living independently.

“I have a few more months until I’m 18. In the next few months I’ll gain more confidence. My case worker is teaching me new skills to take with me when I leave.”(Female, 17)

“If I had the support - checking in from family. Making sure I’m going alright. Could learn more about paying bills etc.”(Female, 18)

“Finishing school, and talking with workers and carers about more information.” (Male, 15)

“Knowledge about what to expect and information.” (Female, 19)


Young people were also asked to consider the likelihood of achieving certain life goals at age 18 compared to 21. When asked the likelihood of completing high school, young people generally rated that this was ‘likely’ but would be closer to ‘very likely’ by the time they turned 21 years. There was a notable increase in the likelihood of being enrolled in further study by the time they were 21 as opposed to 18, as shown in the table below.

Securing part time employment also increased with age, from ‘reasonably likely’ at 18 to ‘quite likely’ by the time young people turned 21. These results imply that with the benefit of support, time and maturity, young people perceive themselves as more likely to achieve certain goals and establish independence. However, the possibility of full time work or apprenticeships showed little change from 18 to 21 years, and young people felt they would be more likely to be employed in part-time work.

Table 7. How likely do you think it would be that you would be able to achieve the following outcomes? (Scale: 1 not at all likely; 6 very likely)

Outcome	By 18 years	By 21 years	Number of Young People who Answered Question
Finish high school	4.9	5.9	17
Enrol in further study	2.8	3.8	18
Completing an Apprenticeship	3.7	3.8	18
Part-time work	4.3	5.5	16
Full-time work	3.3	3.6	15
Find a partner	4.5	5.0	18
Apply for public housing	3.3	4.2	17
Overall Mean	3.8	4.6	-

It is important to note that other factors influence the likelihood of achieving independence. While the option to remain in care reduces the stresses of finances and the threat of homelessness, with the hope in turn to facilitate young people engaging in areas such as further education, consideration is also needed for the unique needs of the individual young person. Young people with a disability for example may need further support to achieve their goals of pursuing employment and education.



“If I had been diagnosed by DCP while in care and got proper support with my disability I would of done way better with my schooling.” (Female, 19 years)

Post-18 year old Support

The response to the question of returning to a placement after leaving the care system was overwhelming positive, with 21 participants reporting that this would be “quite” or “very” helpful. Young people were positive about the idea of having a safety net, so that when challenges arose after moving out of home, they would have the option of returning.

“If I ever needed help it’s nice to know I have that back up support.” (Male, 15 years)

“I need it and would still go back now.” (Female, 19 years)

“Cos mum will always have her doors open to us kids.”?? (Female, 17)

“It would just be helpful if I hit bottom then there’s a place to go”??(Female, 15)

“Would be good in case I get in trouble with money or I need to get another place to stay.” (Male, 15 years)

“Because it’s not easy being a new young adult.” (Male, 17 years)

Young people were very clear: 10 young people in this consultation reported that they think support should be provided until 21 years, and a further 14 said that support should be provided until 25 years and beyond, including not setting an age limit, especially for young people who have a disability.

Young people stipulated that the option of support should be extended to at least 21 so that help and support is provided when issues arose.

“I think that it is good that people are getting that support until 21. It is normalising. It’s because there are so many people who live with their parents and can stay with them and receive that support. It is better so that they are not left to their own devices when they’re 18.” (Female, 17 years)

“I think this is vital or should at least be an option.” (Female, 19 years)

“I feel like some kids are on the journey of their own life and it may take some longer to work it out or feel comfortable, so be able to have support for 21 would very helpful.” (Male, 15 years)


“It would be so good to ring up and ask a question or for help to someone you know after you left care that work in DCP” (Non-Binary, 16 years)

“It’s definitely good, it’s a really good thing. All the support cutting off at 18 and not many 18 year olds nowhere to go or what they’re doing.” (Male, 17 years)

Conclusion

Young people who participated in this consultation could respond to the benefits of having the option to stay with foster and kinship carers after turning 18, and acknowledged the normalising of having a place and people to go back to.

Achieving young adult goals like education, employment, finding a partner and housing were also seen as more likely to be achieved with the option of support post 18 years. Only a small number (n=4) of young people were not at all likely in this group not to take up the option, again not unlike young



people who could be in conflict with their own families or sought to have the freedom of making their own way.

There is significant change taking place within the Department for Child Protection in the optional extension of provision of care to young people in foster or kinship care arrangements. This is a step in the right direction, however this option excludes a significant group of young people living in other out-of-home care situations, such as independent supported housing and residential care. If we are to effectively support young people to transition successfully into adulthood, we need to listen to their voice and respond accordingly. They are telling us that they would like the option to stay or return to their current living arrangement if they need it. This report provides significant reflection for the Department for Child Protection and related OOHC sector when exploring successful and meaningful outcomes for children and young people leaving care.

This consultation also highlights that the same issues concerning transitioning from care continue, with young people experiencing poorer outcomes compared to young people who experience stable family support. Improving the system to respond better to all young people at what can be an exciting time in their lives requires solutions that are practical and achievable, and involve young people directly (CREATE, 2010).

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Maintain a commitment to the National Standards for Out of Home Care, (FaHCSIA, 2011). Young people, as part of the planning process, should be consulted and participate in discussions about placement and housing options before transitioning from care. Young people also need to be informed about the change that affords them the option of remaining in a supported placement with foster and kinship carers.


Recommendation 2: Develop communication strategies to inform young people, case workers and carers about leaving care resources, including life skills development resources and access to services.

Recommendation 3: Explore how young people in residential care can be supported post 18 years.

Recommendation 4: Develop “return home” and support options for all young people across care types who may exit care and then need to return at a later date.

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Appendix One

State:

Postcode:

Age:

I identify as:

- Male
- Female
- I identify with another gender. *Please specify:* _____

Culturally, I identify as:

- Aboriginal
- Torres Strait Islander
- Aboriginal AND Torres Strait Islander
- Other Cultural Group (non-English speaking background) *please specify:* _____
- No Specific Group

How old were you when you came into care?

What type of placement do you live in?

Please select only one.

- Foster care
- Kinship care
- Residential care
- Permanent care
- Semi-independent supported accommodation
- Independent living
- Other *please specify:* _____

Do you have a disability?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Are you receiving special support for your disability (this could include medication, special education, or counselling)?

- Yes
- No

Any additional comments:

What type of disability or impairment do you have (*describe in your own words*)?



1. Who has spoken to you about what will happen in your placement when you turn 18? (You can select more than one).

- No one has spoken to me
- Caseworker
- Foster Carer
- Kinship Carer
- Birth Parents
- Relatives
- Siblings
- Friends
- Other *please specify*

2. Where are you planning to live after you turn 18?

- Foster Carer
- Kinship Carer
- Birth Parents
- Relatives
- Siblings
- Friends
- Partner (Boyfriend/Girlfriend)
- Residential
- Semi-Independent
- Renting with others
- Renting alone
- Public housing
- Unsure

Why do you think this will be your choice?

3. How confident do you feel now about having the life skills you need to live independently?


- Not at all confident
- A little confident
- Somewhat confident
- Reasonably confident
- Quite confident
- Very confident
- Not applicable

What might help increase your confidence?

4. If you could stay with your current carer after you turn 18, how likely is it that you would take that option?

- Not at all likely
- A little likely
- Somewhat likely
- Reasonably likely
- Quite likely
- Very likely

Why do you think this would be the case?



5. What do you think would be good about staying with your present carer?

6. What might be challenging about staying with your present carer?

7. What supports might help you address those challenges?

8. To what age do you think support should be provided for remaining with a carer?

18 years

21 years

25 years

No age limit

9. How likely is it that you will have achieved the following in the two timeframes:

By the time you turn 18?

By the time you turn 21?

Completed high school

Not at all likely

A little likely

Somewhat likely

Reasonably likely

Quite likely

Very likely

Already completed year 12

Enrolled in further study (TAFE, University, Other)

Not at all likely

A little likely

Somewhat likely

Reasonably likely

Quite likely

Very likely

Not applicable

Be in an apprenticeship

Not at all likely

A little likely

Somewhat likely

Reasonably likely

Quite likely

Very likely

Not applicable

Be employed part-time

Not at all likely

A little likely

Somewhat likely

Reasonably likely

Quite likely

Very likely



Not applicable

Be employed full-time

Not at all likely
A little likely
Somewhat likely
Reasonably likely
Quite likely
Very likely
Not applicable

Found a partner (Boyfriend/Girlfriend)

Not at all likely
A little likely
Somewhat likely
Reasonably likely
Quite likely
Very likely
Not applicable

Applied for public housing

Not at all likely
A little likely
Somewhat likely
Reasonably likely
Quite likely
Very likely
Not applicable

10. How helpful do you think it would be, if you have left the care system, to be able to return to receive the support of carers after you turn 18?

Not at all helpful
A little helpful
Somewhat helpful
Reasonably helpful
Quite helpful
Very helpful
Not applicable

11. Is there anything else you would like to say on the topic of having placement support for young people until they turn 21?