

CREATE's Position

While most young adults in the community remain with family into their mid-to-late twenties, young people in out-of-home care often have to leave their placement at 18. This transition from care is often associated with difficulty accessing employment, education and stable accommodation accompanied by a lack of a strong support network of people who can provide emotional, material, and professional assistance. While post-care services and supports currently exist in every state and territory, they are often discretionary, under-resourced, and access to them is dependent on the young person's knowledge of and capacity to engage with them.

CREATE calls for state and territory governments to provide young people with the option to remain in care until 21, regardless of placement type. While young people would cease being on care and protection orders at age 18, they could be supported to remain with a foster or kinship carer, or be provided with another placement, such as in a semi-supported accommodation program.

Providing this continuing support to young people could mitigate some of the poorer outcomes experienced by many leaving care. Extending care until 21 gives young people a secure base to return to in times of stress, and can provide consequential benefits from having more time to gain greater maturity, financial security, and practical support to cope with a more gradual transition.

Evidence

- National Standards 2, 7 and 13 for Out-of-Home care relate to Leaving care and Homelessness (FaHCSIA, 2011).
- CREATE has found that 35% of young people experience homelessness within their first year of leaving care, 29% were unemployed, and 46% of male adolescents had been involved in the youth justice system (McDowall, 2009).
- Based on the successes of extending care until 21 internationally (Courtney, Okpych, & Park, 2018), it is predicted that extending care in Australia will halve the percentage of young people who become

homeless after leaving care, 39% to 19.5% (Deloitte Access Economics, 2016).

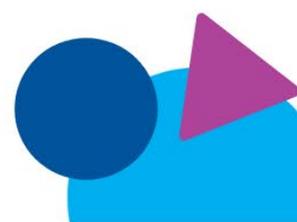
- Socioeconomic cost benefit analyses have estimated that the probability of young people accessing higher education is increased, while the probabilities of being arrested, hospitalised, or dependent on alcohol or drugs are decreased when care is extended to 21 (Deloitte Access Economics, 2016).
- Young people are not involved in the development of their leaving care plans. CREATE has found that only 24.4% of young people aged 15-18 knew of their leaving care plan (McDowall, 2018). Official government reporting states that 60% of young people possess a leaving care plan (AIHW, 2018), and this discrepancy indicates young people are not being involved in plan development or know the language being utilised. This calls into question how well the plans can suit their needs, e.g., McDowall (2009) found that 40% of young people preparing to transition did not know where they would be living upon leaving care.

Actions

States and territory governments must commit to implementing options for young people to remain in a supported placement until they are 21. Several states (ACT, TAS, SA) have made this commitment; others have commenced trials of similar programs (VIC, WA). However, these must be broadened and extended to include all young people in care. Supported placement options also need to be made available to young people leaving residential care.

CREATE further advocates for the following:

1. Young people leaving care are involved in meaningful, comprehensive leaving care planning. The young person should be given the opportunity to be engaged so that the plan is aligned with their needs. Active engagement in planning will reduce the high levels of uncertainty and anxiety associated with leaving care.
2. Accessing support services and initiatives can involve navigating confusing, convoluted processes and forms. Young people may not



have the support to navigate bureaucratic processes on their own, or struggle to find necessary supporting documentation. Further, application forms may be difficult to complete for young people with a disability. Alongside extension of care, departments should resource case management for young people leaving care to assist in accessing services.

3. Leaving care support services should engage in trauma informed practice to prevent the retraumatisation of young people seeking assistance from these services. Services should be able to respond to trauma, provide a safe environment, and empower young people by ensuring they have real choice, autonomy, and are informed.
4. Young people need to be supported to engage in education and employment opportunities. This requires investment in evidence-based programs and initiatives, and availability of alternative, flexible learning environments that are made available for young people to pursue.

References

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