

Submission to the Department of Transport and Planning on developing a new plan for Victoria

“We need to shift away from housing being a commodity... it should be a human right!” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2024a)

“Housing shapes every other aspect of your life.” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2024a)

“We need sustainable low-income housing without having somewhere to go that is safe and sustainable every other aspect won't be sustained, it is THE FOUNDATION, and I can say that through experience.” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2024a)

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About CREATE Foundation

CREATE Foundation is the national consumer peak 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 with a statutory care experience and developing policy and research to advocate for a better care system.


Introduction

CREATE Foundation welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Department of Transport and Planning on a new plan for Victoria. CREATE is pleased to see that the Department has engaged in a significant consultation process collecting around 9,000 pieces of engagement data to develop their *8 Big Ideas*¹. Given our remit to elevate the voices of children and young people with a care experience, this submission focuses on what we have heard from young people with experience of the out-of-home care system in Victoria, and the ideas they would like to see incorporated into a new plan for Victoria.

As at June 2023, there were 9,132 children and young people in out-of-home care in Victoria (Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing [AIHW], 2024). 2,668 children and young people within this cohort are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (AIHW, 2024). Concerningly approximately 60% (n = 5445) of these children and young people have been in continuous care for more than 2 years (2 years to <5 years; or 5 years or more) (AIHW, 2024). The adverse impacts of prolonged contact with both the child protection and out-of-home care systems are well documented and can persist well beyond the care years with young people at a higher risk of housing instability and more vulnerable to financial hardship (Martin et al., 2021; Murray et al., 2020).

Further a qualitative study of young people experiences of transitioning from care in Victoria and Western Australia found that the majority of young people (n = 28/34) who participated in the study were emotionally unprepared to leave care; with young people consistently pointing to rushed planning as a key factor contributing to this (Mendes et al., 2023). The majority of young people (n = 21/34) in this study spoke to the complexity that having unmet and intersecting needs added to their transition (Mendes et al., 2023). Unmet and intersecting needs included for example: trauma; housing; physical and mental (ill) health; substance misuse; family responsibilities; previous

¹ The 8 big ideas include: more homes in locations with great public transport access; more housing options for all Victorians, including social and affordable homes; more jobs and opportunities closer to where you live; more options for how we move from place to place; more certainty and guidance on how places will change over time; more trees and urban greening in our parks and community space; more protections from flooding, bushfire and climate hazards and; greater protection of our agricultural land.



experiences of service delivery; and education and employment opportunities and engagement (Mendes et al., 2023).

As such CREATE sees ‘more housing options for all Victorians, including social and affordable homes; more jobs and opportunities closer to where you live; more options for how we move from place to place; and more trees and urban greening in our parks and community space’ as pivotal [Big Ideas](#) with the potential to influence the trajectories and life pathways of young people transitioning from care. Prioritisation of their needs in an effort to build strong footing and bases will enable positive experiences as young people leave care and transition into adulthood.

Summary of CREATE’s recommendations:

1. [Big Ideas](#) require big commitments: CREATE is calling on the Department of Transport and Planning to drive a shift in mindset and lead the charge to enshrine housing as a human right in Victoria. This should be complemented with a commitment to prioritise access to housing for young people with a care experience and guaranteed housing placement for young people with a care experience to the age of 25 years in the new plan for Victoria.
2. As part of planning around providing ‘more options for how we move from place to place’: CREATE is urging the Department of Transport and Planning to ease the burden of public transport costs on young people transitioning from care. This could be done by issuing a custom-myki that extends the benefit of student concession to young people transitioning from care to the age of 25 years.
3. To honour young people with a care experience’s desire to build community via access to urban green and community spaces by applying minimum targets for public green spaces and open community areas within Local Government Areas developing partnerships with private land holders to increase public green spaces and open community areas infrastructure within the new plan for Victoria.


Detailed recommendations

[Big Ideas](#) require big commitments: Future proof policy attitudes to housing by enshrining access to safe, affordable and stable housing as a human right

CREATE strongly supports the inclusion of ‘more housing options for all Victorians, including social and affordable homes’ as one of the 8 big ideas for Victoria’s future. At CREATE we know that safe, secure and affordable housing is crucial for a young person’s successful transition out of care and into independent living. It is linked to better health and wellbeing outcomes in general (Rolfe et al., 2020), and it also provides a secure base for social and economic participation.

Such a [Big Idea](#) however, requires Governments to see housing not just as something to buy (or valued as a ‘commodity or investment’), but as a basic human right for everyone. Internationally, access to adequate housing is a basic human right contained within the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966](#) (ICESCR), Article 11. Australia has agreed to this, and Victoria has the opportunity to include the right to housing within its existing [Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006](#); noting that in its current state the Act already contains protections for rights articulated in the ICESCR. CREATE is also not alone in calling for the recognition of a right to housing with the [final Report](#) from the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry into the rental and housing affordability crisis in Victoria making similar calls.

The pressurised social housing situation in Victoria fails to offer a safety net for those at risk of homelessness and unable to gain footing in the private rental market. As at March 2024 there were 48,620 new applications to the Victorian Housing Register (Department of Families, Fairness and Housing [DFFH], 2024). Of these, 26,449 were for priority access (DFFH, 2024). Young people with a care experience cannot afford to be lost in this sea of applications.



The right to adequate housing means taking steps to prevent homelessness, supporting the most vulnerable and marginalised groups, and ensuring that everyone's housing is secure and adequate (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2009). Young people consistently tell CREATE about the need for stronger protections around the right to housing and more support to help them access sustainable housing, highlighting that:

“We need to shift away from housing being a commodity... it should be a human right!” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2024a)

“Move away from seeing housing as an investment” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2024a)

“Housing shapes every other aspect of your life.” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2024a)

“We need sustainable low-income housing without having somewhere to go that is safe and sustainable every other aspect won't be sustained, it is THE FOUNDATION, and I can say that through experience.” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2024a)

Young people also reflected on what they need in terms of transition planning to ensure they can gain access to and remain in safe and stable housing:

“You should be actively involving young people in decisions about their housing and offering them different options and resources to make informed decisions and educate them on their rights and responsibilities as a tenant.” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2024a)

“I live in lead tenant at the moment so it's a bit of a weird placement. It's like a middle ground between being independent but still under child protection. It's a medium-term type thing from 16-18, I'm turning 17 soon and nobody's really told me what transitioning will look like. They've finally started to [talk about it] after I brought it up to a dozen care teams and complained to a number of people.” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2024b)

Young people with a care experience have also shared ideas about new housing models that could better meet their needs and improve their experiences, including:

“[On Lead Tenant programs] – I found the house to be quite supportive and house mates give each other space but dynamic change when house mates change.” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2024a)

“[on Youth Foyer models] ...for success they need to be ready for education. There needs to be support around the other things (employment, health, and social connections) that support young people to engage in education... get the buy in from the young person to then be able to get something out of it.” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2024a)

“Youth foyer is a great model and uses advantage thinking... But after the foyer I had a breakdown in housing that was out of my control...” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2024a)

Young people's experiences and deep reflections speak to a few key learnings:

- young people must be involved in all decision-making about their housing as part of robust transition planning and should be provided with different options and resources to make informed decisions
- there is a need for careful and considered housing placements decision in Lead Tenant programs to promote more positive house dynamics and improved safety; and
- while the [Youth Foyer](#) model is well-suited to young people leaving care by delivering stable accommodation and multidisciplinary, community-based support, there is a need for a more gradual reduction of support to better safeguard housing outcomes in post-Foyer life.



To translate these [Big Ideas](#) into real outcomes for young people with a care experience, CREATE is calling on the Department of Transport and Planning to:


- Lead a mindset shift to support a whole of government approach within the new plan for Victoria, to prioritise access to safe, affordable and stable housing as a human right. This would build off momentum in the Community Sector and the [final Report](#) from the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry into the rental and housing affordability crisis in Victoria.
- Prioritise the cohort of young people with a care experience in the new plan for Victoria under the idea of ‘*more housing options for all Victorians, including social and affordable homes*’ to ensure they can access safe, stable and affordable housing. This could include a whole of government guarantee to provide housing placements for young people with a care experience up to the age of 25.
- Consider as part of ‘*more housing options for all Victorians, including social and affordable homes*’ –
 - Providing a dedicated social housing supply for young people as called for by the Council to Homeless Persons (2024).
 - Expanding [Youth Foyer](#) models with a view to increase supply and capacity of support to better meet the needs of young people with a care experience. This should include a more gradual reduction in support to ensure a smooth transition into post-Foyer life.
 - Investing in innovative Aboriginal-led housing options for young care leavers in settings that are culturally rich and managed by the community. This could include [Moorumbina Mongurnallin](#), which is the first independent living model developed exclusively for First Nations young people.
 - To open up the private rental market for young people with a care experience and provide them with more housing options, include within the new plan for Victoria a rental subsidy targeted at young people leaving care up to age 25. This would help them enter the private rental market and maintain their tenancies, as part of a broader commitment to ensuring stable housing for this cohort.
- In recognition of their expertise by lived experience, establish direct and focussed consultation mechanisms (e.g., Youth Expert Advisory Groups) with care experienced young people to better understand their housing needs, their preferred options, and their long-term housing solutions.

Easing the burden of public transport costs as young people transition from care and build their independence

CREATE supports the inclusion of ‘*more options for how we move from place to place*’ to help Victorians move around more easily. The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) recent [Poverty Mapping Insights Report](#) highlighted that more than one in six children (17.6%) are living in poverty in Victoria (VCOSS, 2023). Further the Victorian’s Government’s 2024/25 Budget acknowledged the impact that increases in inflation has had on the cost of groceries and other living expenses (Victoria State Government, 2024).

Recent data collected via Monash University indicates that amid the cost-of-living crisis, 86% of young Australians (aged 18–24 years) experienced financial difficulties in the last year (Walsh et al., 2024). Cost of living pressures have a disproportionate impact on young people transitioning from care; they are more vulnerable to financial hardship and risk of homelessness, as they do not always have access the safety net of extended family to hold them through times of higher need (Martin et al., 2021). Young people continue to tell CREATE about the fears they hold around transitioning from care:

“I’m still very scared. If no funding is there is it going to be ok?” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2024b)



“Sometimes you don't have \$10 to top up your myki and you need to get around. It's a barrier to getting to work and interviews and stuff.” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2024c)

Young people's comments speak to the need for a whole of government approach to support them transitioning from care. Young people also spoke to the inaccessibility of public transport in regional and remote areas and offered some solutions for change:

“Maybe a card that can be used as more than myki, like a taxi voucher.” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2024c)

“A transport card... a hotline for transport needs.” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2024c)

“[Regional town] doesn't have Uber, or good buses. She has to bike ride now at 6am [to get to work].” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2024c)

“I know a young person who gets up at 5am and doesn't get home until 7pm, travels 5 hrs a day.” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2024c)

To support children and young people with a care experiences, especially young people transitioning from care to build their independence, CREATE recommends the Department of Transport and Planning to:

- Issue a custom-myki to all young people with a care experience that would extend the benefit of student concession (i.e., unlimited travel on all train, tram and bus services within chosen zones until the expiry of the pass) until the age of 25 years.
 - For young people under the age of 18 years, caseworkers and/or carers could be consulted along with children and young people to determine appropriate chosen zones.
 - For young people over the age of 18 years, chosen zones should be discussed as part of transition from care planning. This would scaffold and supplement existing transition support packages provided by DFFH via Better Futures/Home Stretch program.
- Consider issuing a myki-style card to care experienced children and young people in regional and remote areas to access discounted taxi rides.


Building a community to wrap around young people with a care experience

CREATE welcomes the inclusion of ‘*more trees and urban greening in our parks and community space*’ as one of the [Big Ideas](#) for Victoria's future. Young people who in contact with the child protection and out of home care system often carry experiences of trauma as a result of experiences prior to entering the care system, experiences of entering care, adverse experiences within the care system, and placement breakdowns. As they begin to plan for leaving care, young people also often feel unprepared, isolated and uncertain. Young people in Victoria have spoken to CREATE about how they felt when the first entered care and the impact that such experiences continue to have on their lives including the ability to build connection and a community of support:

“By 10 [years old], you've accumulated so much stress. You're constantly walking around with your guard up.” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2023a)

“Past trauma can affect how young people build connections.” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2023b)

“My first experiences I remember were very challenging because there were so many changes. I wasn't ready for being at school. All your friends would have their mum, dad, and siblings and be together. When it came to family days they would all come to school but my mum wasn't allowed to be there. It was stressful.” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2024b).



To mitigate and build a strong sense of self through which young people can begin to process their experiences and heal/manage their trauma responses, young people with a care experience often seek to build their own communities of support:

“Having family or community around really helps. I have a friend from my community who I can talk to about everything until my family arrives”. (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2023a)

“If I think something bad or feel bad I go out with my friends and they help me feel differently. We go outside or play PlayStation and talk about what is going on in life.” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2023a)

“Um I play sports and always go outside. Specifically, I play basketball and go skateboarding with my friends. If I'm not doing that I'm going to the beach or going for a walk or doing something outside.” (Young person, Vic) (CREATE Foundation, 2023a)

Their comments speak to the need for accessible green spaces and areas where community, in all senses of the word is both built and happens within.

Young people with a care experience want to build community via access to urban green and community spaces, so CREATE recommends the Department of Transport and Planning:

- Make a commitment to value public green spaces and open community areas as part of the new plan for Victoria. Consider recommendations made by the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) in their [submission](#) to the *Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Climate Resilience in Victoria* to increase the number of and access to public green spaces and open community areas, including –
 - applying minimum targets for public green spaces and open community areas within Local Government Areas based on forecasted population density estimates, and
 - develop partnerships (by for example offering incentives) with private land holders to increase public green spaces and open community areas infrastructure (National Trust of Australia [Victoria], 2024).

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to the Department of Transport and Planning on a new plan for Victoria. CREATE sees *‘more housing options for all Victorians, including social and affordable homes; more jobs and opportunities closer to where you live; more options for how we move from place to place; and more trees and urban greening in our parks and community space’* as pivotal [Big Ideas](#) with the potential to influence the trajectories and life pathways of young people transitioning from care. Prioritisation of their needs in an effort to build strong footing and bases will enable positive experiences as young people leave care and transition into adulthood. This can be achieved via the new plan for Victoria by driving the momentum to enshrine housing as a human right, easing the costs of living by extends the benefit of student concession to young people transitioning from care to the [age of 25 years](#), and embedding a commitment to increasing access to green and community spaces.


Should you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Jazmin Ealden, National Advocacy and Influencing Manager, CREATE Foundation.

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