



creating a better life
for children and young
people in care

CREATE Foundation Submission

Have Your Say - 2026-2027 Tasmania's Pre-Budget Consultation

7th December 2025

"If [young people] are leaving care, I don't even know how they do it in this economy with the cost of living and everything. I can barely afford life, I don't know how an 18-year-old is going to afford life, I remember at 18 I was [earning] nothing." – Young Person, Tasmania

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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 advocating for policy change that will create a better care system.



Introduction

CREATE Foundation welcomes the release of the *Tasmanian Interim Budget 2025-2026*. While we acknowledge the positive investments in out-of-home care, the Transition to Independence program, and family support services, CREATE remains concerned that the broader package of support measures does not fully address the unique needs, rights and lived experiences of children and young people in out-of-home care, particularly those transitioning from care or experiencing placement instability.

CREATE Foundation recognises the \$15 million investment over two years to support out-of-home care services aligned with the Commission of Inquiry recommendations. While this funding is a positive step, young people consistently share that investment alone does not guarantee the consistent, trauma-informed and stable placements they identify as essential to their wellbeing. Current allocations remain broad and generic, lacking a clear requirement to prioritise placement stability, relationship continuity, and child-centred, rights-respecting practice.

CREATE Foundation acknowledges the Budgets commitments, including;

- **\$15 million over two years for out-of-home care services.** CREATE welcomes this but urges the Tasmanian Government to ensure the investment explicitly supports stability, relational continuity and trauma-informed care, as young people repeatedly describe these areas as most critical for their wellbeing.
- **\$2 million to the Foster and Kinship Care Uplift.** Increasing the best rate of support payments by 15% for one year for all foster carers. CREATE encourages a longer-term, sustainable approach to ensure carers can continue to provide safe, stable placements.
- **\$10.3 million over four years for Bringing Baby Home,** supporting families in crises. CREATE urges continued evaluation and expansion of evidence-based family preservation services to reduce the likelihood of children entering out-of-home care unnecessarily.
- **\$9.89 million over four years to establish the Commission for Children and Young People.** This is a positive step towards embedding children's rights in policy and service delivery. CREATE advocates that this body explicitly funds mechanisms for children and young people in out-of-home care to participate in decision-making, including a Youth Advisory Council or similar consultative structures, ensuring that the voices of care-experienced children inform policies and programs that affect them.
- **\$6.2 million to extend the Transition to Independence program,** supporting up to 120 young people leaving care. While this funding is welcomed, CREATE notes that leaving-care supports remain limited in scope, and many young people face challenges securing stable housing, accessing education, and achieving financial independence. CREATE is calling for leaving-care supports to be extended to age 25, including financial assistance, housing, education, and employment supports to ensure young people can make safe and sustainable transitions into adulthood.

CREATE Foundation also identifies critical omissions in the Budget, including;

- **Dedicated, trauma-informed health and mental health supports for children and young people in care,** including universal assessments upon entry to care and ongoing therapeutic interventions. Young people continue to report that mainstream mental health and health services are not equipped to understand or respond to trauma associated with being in care.
- **Investment in diversion programs and small-home therapeutic out-of-home care models that prioritise stability, safety, and wellbeing,** along with stronger integration between out-of-home care, Youth Justice, health and education systems. Despite continued investment, care-experienced young people remain overrepresented in the youth justice system, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated, system-wide reform.



Key Insights and Recommendations

Which programs/projects could be refocused to deliver for outcomes with more streamlined resources or refined focus?

Refocusing programs toward basic rights and direct support

Children and young people with a care experience consistently tell us that programs only work when they meet basic rights and real-life needs – safety, stability, belonging, housing, financial security, mental health support, and relationships with consistent adults. When these needs are not met, programs fail, no matter how well-intentioned or well-funded. Young people in Tasmania describe navigating fragmented systems, inconsistent support, and inaccessible programs.

“[Child Safety] took over a year to contact me about the \$2500 [After Care Support]... [I received] no contact before that, until two weeks before I had to use the money” – Young person, Tasmania

CREATE strongly recommends refocusing programs toward basic rights and direct support. Despite multiple programs, young people repeatedly tell CREATE that support does not arrive when they need it. Refocusing resources toward youth-informed and rights-based essentials would streamline outcomes without requiring substantial new investment. When the information is not available, children and young people miss out.

“All the information’s on that flyer... why is this flyer not used out in the public?” – Young person, Tasmania

Transition to Independence: A necessary but insufficient step

The Transition to Independence funding in the 2025-2026 Budget is positive, however it is neither flexible nor equitable. Transition supports remain capped at 120 young people, excluding many who require assistance.

Young people with a care experience consistently state that transition at 18 violates their right to a safe, supported pathway into adulthood.

“18 is too young to move out... people outside of care, aren’t moving out [of their family homes] till their 20’s or 30’s.” – Young person, Tasmania


“that’s how we slide through the cracks... we become homeless.” – Young person, Tasmania

A rights-respecting system must align with developmental realities. CREATE strongly recommends extending leaving-care supports to age 25, the national best-practice standards, and believes there should be further funding to ensure that there is access for all children and young people transitioning from care. Young people repeatedly tell us they cannot engage meaningfully when they are unsure where they will sleep or how they will pay for food or transport.

“you should be able to enjoy your 18th birthday... you shouldn’t be worrying about where you’re sleeping on your 18th” – Young person, Tasmania

Insecure living arrangements create systemic barriers that no young person can overcome alone. CREATE recommends prioritising funding for safe housing, cost-of-living support, and extended care until age 25, supported by young people with a care experience repeatedly highlighting as critical for a successful transition to independence.

Trauma-informed, specialised mental health supports



Children and young people in care have the right to mental health services that recognises the impacts of trauma, placement instability and disrupted attachments. Their experiences require practice that is not just trauma-aware, but trauma-responsive and tailored to the realities of the care system. understand their experiences. Young people share with us that generic mental health services do not meet their needs.

“practitioners [need] experience of the out-of-home care system and what young people [in care] might have to deal with.” – Young person, Tasmania

“A lot of therapists are trauma informed, but if you’re talking specifically to kids in out of home care there is a level of care that needs to be given there, perhaps on a higher level. The training for people who are working [with children and young people in care] needs to be in more in-depth” – Young person, Tasmania

Investment is required to build a specialist workforce where practitioners are trained specifically in the mental health needs of children in out-of-home care, including therapeutic models that honour their rights to safety, dignity and relational trust. Without this, children are forced to fit into systems that were never designed for them, rather than systems being shaped around their rights and experiences.

Enhanced case management

While CREATE supports the intent to improve oversight, responsiveness and decision-making, young people consistently report that system improvements fall short when they do not translate into manageable caseloads, stable relationships and consistent, skilled caseworkers who uphold their right to be heard and actively involved in every decision that affects their lives.


“the decisions that are being made are going to impact them [children and young people] specifically, so you have to have their input” – Young person, Tasmania

As currently proposed, the budget response does not ensure sustainable caseloads, continuity of workers over time, or improved practice quality that strengthens relational stability. Without these essential conditions, children’s rights to safety, participation, cultural connection and a stable, nurturing environment remain at risk. To be meaningful, strengthened case management must move beyond structural reform and embed relational practice, accountability and rights-respecting decision-making at every level of the system.

CREATE recommends:

- Refocussing programs toward rights-based essentials identified by young people; safety, stability, timely housing support, financial security, trauma-informed mental health care and consistent relationships with workers
- Accessible information that is visible and youth-friendly so young people do not miss out on entitlements and supports
- Expansion of Transition to Independence supports to age 25, ensuring flexible, equitable access beyond the current cap of 120 young people
- Dedicated trauma-informed mental health pathways delivered by practitioners trained in the experiences and needs of children and young people in care
- Strengthening Enhanced Case Management by guaranteeing sustainable caseloads, continuity of workers and consistently high-quality, relational practice

Are there initiatives or investments that could be reconsidered helping balance the budget now, without losing sight of long-term goals?



CREATE is concerned that significant budget allocations prioritise infrastructure-heavy responses, over early, preventative and therapeutic supports. This approach is costly and inconsistent with children's rights, freedom, choices and everyday life, limiting connection to family, community, and a rights-respecting care environment.

Young people with care experience are overrepresented in the youth justice system, and the current allocation does not sufficiently prioritise diversion, prevention, or rehabilitation strategies that evidence shows can reduce later costs and improve life outcomes. Infrastructure cannot fix what is fundamentally a resourcing, prevention, and support problem.

Invest in prevention, not expansion

The Bringing Baby Home program is a strong example of early interventions aligned with children's rights. CREATE encourages its continued evaluation and expansion to reduce unnecessary entries into care.

Short-term uplift funding for carers is welcomed, but insufficient. CREATE urges a longer-term, sustainable commitment to ensure foster and kinship carers can provide stable and supported placements for children and young people.

Reconsidering investments that do not address the foundational needs of children and young people would free resources for interventions that reduce long-term costs, such as stable housing, providing financial support for essentials, and expanding trauma-informed mental health services. Redirection toward evidence-based, youth-informed programs ensures that both short-term budget goals and long-term wellbeing outcomes are achieved rather than continuing systemic failure.

CREATE recommends:

- Reconsidering high-cost infrastructure investment toward early intervention, therapeutic supports, and community-based care
- Ensuring funding decisions prioritise children's long-term wellbeing and rights, not short-term operational pressures
- A longer-term, sustainable commitment to the safety and stability of children and young people in care


Are there programs or services that could be transitioned out as the needs of Tasmanians evolve and priorities shift?

CREATE Foundation observes that while the Budget provides resources for out-of-home care and youth services, certain traditional models are outdated and should be transitioned in favour of more effective approaches.

Large, residential care facilities continue to be funded, yet evidence and young people's lived experience indicate these environments often fail to provide stability, attachment, or trauma-informed care.

Over-reliance on secure or custodial Youth Justice facilities does not address the underlying needs of care-experienced youth and misses opportunities for early intervention or therapeutic alternatives. Programs that emphasis compliance, surveillance, or crisis containment over relational, trauma-informed care should be phased out. Young people with a care experience have expressed that compliance-focused services do not meet their lived needs.

"My psychologist was organised by the department... it didn't feel safe to tell the psychologist things"
– Young person, Tasmania



Phasing out ineffective programs would allow Tasmania to prioritise the rights of all children and focus on youth-led, trauma-informed supports. Transitioning these out is not a reduction of support, it is a strategic realignment that prioritises what children and young people say works for them.

CREATE recommends:

- A transition away from non-therapeutic residential and custodial models toward smaller, home-like, therapeutic environments
- Integrated diversion programs ensuring access to health, education and mental health supports

Where could government activities be re-calibrated to operate more effectively, while still meeting essential needs?

Recalibration must centre the rights, voices and lived expertise of children and young people in care. Despite ongoing budget commitments, opportunities for participation remain limited, meaning children continue to have little influence over decisions that directly shape their lives. Access to health and mental health supports is inconsistent, and high caseloads continue to undermine continuity, stability and relational safety – fundamental components of a rights-respecting care system.

A genuine rights-respecting system requires stable housing pathways, practical financial support, trauma-informed mental health services, consistent caseworkers, and genuine involvement of children and young people in all planning, decision-making, delivery and review processes. Structural recalibration across government must focus on creating environments where every child experiences safety, stability, permanency, connection and wellbeing as core entitlements rather than aspirational outcomes.

CREATE recommends:

- Meaningful youth participation embedded across all policy and program design
- A state-wide, trauma-informed health and mental health pathway prioritising children and young people in care
- Guaranteed continuity in case management
- Necessary care and support for all children and young people to experience safety, stability, permanency, connection and wellbeing as core entitlements

For any new funding ideas (specifying whether operation or capital), what savings or offsets could be identified elsewhere to ensure the overall budget remains balanced?

CREATE recommends a range of targeted operational and capital investments to better support children and young people with a care-experience.

Operational funding priorities

- Establishing a Youth Advisory Council for out-of-home care
- Mandatory health, trauma and developmental assessments upon entry to care
- Extending leaving care supports to age 25, including housing, education and employment support

Capital investment priorities

- Establishing small, therapeutic home pilots to replace large residential models
- Developing an integrated digital case-management system linking Out-of-Home Care, Youth Justice, Health and Education

Offsets to maintain budget balance

A rights-based budget approach requires redirecting funds from ineffective or outdated models toward those that uphold wellbeing, permanence and long-term outcomes.

CREATE recommends:

1. **Reducing reliance on high-cost residential care:** Large residential care is one of the most expensive out-of-home care responses, yet produces poorer outcomes. Transitioning to small, therapeutic homes provides better results at a lower long-term cost.
2. **Reallocating spending from custodial youth justice expansion:** Investment should focus on diversion, community programs, and therapeutic responses that reduce demand for custodial beds.
3. **Consolidating overlapping service contracts:** Multiple programs currently duplicate functions in youth engagement, crisis response, and leaving-care assistance. Consolidating these into integrated, youth-informed services would reduce administrative overhead.
4. **Repurposing unused or under-utilised departmental infrastructure:** Vacant or ageing assets can be transitioned into supported accommodation, therapeutic hubs, or sold/repurposed for revenue.
5. **Redirecting short-term pilot spending into long-term evidence-based interventions:** Pilots that lack evaluation or do not align with rights-based best practice should be discontinued, with funds redirected to early intervention and permanency supports.

Conclusion

CREATE Foundation welcomes the interim investments in out-of-home care, leaving-care programs, family support services, and the establishment of the Commission for Children and Young People. From the perspective of children and young people with a care experience, ongoing gaps persist in placement stability, participations, access to trauma-informed health and mental health supports, and leaving-care entitlements.

CREATE calls on the Tasmanian Government to strengthen these areas in the 2026-2027 Budget, to ensure the rights, needs and voices of children and young people in care are fully reflected in funding decisions, and that investments translate into meaningful outcomes. The voices of care-experienced young people make clear that stable relationships, safe placements, consistent caseworkers, and access to timely supports are non-negotiable components of a rights-respecting care system.

As the national consumer body representing the voices of children and young people with an out-of-home care experience, CREATE strongly advocates for explicit inclusion of their perspectives across all policy, program and budget responses.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute. CREATE looks forward to ongoing collaboration with the Tasmanian Government to ensure future budgets amplify the voices, uphold the rights and improve the wellbeing of children and young people in out-of-home care across Tasmania.