

Homelessness and Leaving Care: The experiences of young adults in Queensland and Victoria, and implications for practice

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2013

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KEYWORDS: homelessness, leaving care, early intervention, transition from care, prevention, child protection, young people.

OBJECTIVES:

The research questions were:

- 1 What is the post care experience of young people who leave care in terms of homelessness and risk of homelessness?
- 2 What do young people with a care experience who have been homeless (whether this be pre or post leaving care) consider was or would have been useful in their case?
- 3 What are the practice and policy implications of the research findings for both in care policies and practice, and post care policy and practice?
- 4 How can further investigation of post care experiences be structured so as to inform enhanced policy and practice for transition from and post care experience?

Non-Technical Summary

This research first asks ‘What happens when young people leave state care?’ in respect of Victoria and Queensland and second ‘What are the service support implications of this?’ A number of methods were used to explore these questions including semi-structured interviews with 27 young adults aged 19-23 years who had been homeless or at risk of homelessness, and focus groups with young people and service providers. The interviews and focus groups gathered young people’s experiences of leaving care, what has assisted them, and what they think is needed in terms of support. Service provider perspectives and current leaving care provisions were also canvassed.

Leaving care services play a vital role in preventing homelessness for young people leaving care particularly for those who have a volatile in-care experience. Those who experience volatile in care experiences have variable experiences post care but can, with a combination of the development of their own networks and support services, gain the stability they need for the future. When young people received consistent transition from care support this was almost always found to be very useful, and a pathway to accessing a broader range of support.

This said there are a range of factors in the way leaving care is currently approached that may contribute to homelessness. The experience of transition planning was variable with many young people saying it either did not happen, was ceremonial, or only occurred with any quality following proactive efforts by the young person or an advocate. Whilst access to long term public housing was a desired goal, long term stable transitional housing or private rental was a sufficient platform for gaining a sense of control and stability in their living situation, as long as the permanent option was being pursued. Where young people have safe, long term and adequate housing, positive supportive adult relationships and/ or service support that bridge leaving care and extend into their twenties they are able to move towards lives they see as meaningful and positive. Currently access to transitional and public housing by young people in Victoria is patchy and in Queensland very limited.

We also found that young people leaving care have aspirations that may exceed those some others have of them. They need to be supported to pursue their aspirations. Some, particularly those who have had volatile pathways through out-of-home care, can need substantial support in developing a sense of hope and optimism. A stable and safe place to live together with one or more key people who act as advocates/ advisors and mentors, provides a platform for educational and workforce engagement. The development of social networks is a critical task of transitioning from care, and in preventing future homelessness. Family is a key consideration however, for young people transitioning from care this is most usefully understood in terms of the development of families of destination or family of choice, rather than centred around birth parents and family of origin (some members of which may be part of the young person’s family of destination). The key question for these young people is, who currently wants to and is able to be a positive person in their journey into the next period of their life.

Young people who have been in care and are over 21 years old still needed the type of support provided by leaving care services. For this reason mental health services and youth services which

worked with young adults till 25 years and provided multi-faceted case work support were experienced as particularly useful for young people over 21.

Almost all the young people interviewed think proactive and supportive periodic contact post care by non-government support services would be a good thing. This is premised on their awareness that they do have support needs and appreciate when support and information is made available to them in accessible ways.

- Almost all consider leaving care support should be available until 25 years and commence somewhere from 14 to 16 years.
- Most see 12 months as a minimum period for support workers to be with them, premised on the assumption that they are 'good workers'. They are quite realistic that workers need to move on, meaning there are practical limits.
- Young people gain enormously when systems, policies and practices are sufficiently flexible (or turn a blind eye) so as to allow them to maintain ongoing relationships with those few people (often only one) they develop a particular bond with during their in care experience. Whilst they see these people as 'friends' it is clear these are both purposeful and positive relationships to these young people and not seen as problematic in terms of blurring professional boundaries.
- Early intervention into youth homelessness principles of practice have relevance for the provision of support post care.

This study provides support for the proposition that young people should be proactively and voluntarily involved in periodic monitoring of their lived experience post care and linkage of this monitoring to the activation of timely support. The great majority of young people involved in this study thought this was not only desirable but important. Whilst some young people will be in close contact with leaving care services many others will not. New research is recommended to develop a mentoring and support activation process using participatory monitoring and action research methods. This type of approach reflects the importance of utilising processes *with* young people in care and leaving care which acknowledge their personhood and capacity to contribute voluntarily to the processes which seek to support them. This study's recommendations are as follows:

- **Recommendation 1:** *That action research is undertaken to develop voluntary monitoring and support activation processes available to all young people post care and which involve young people in and leaving care in their development and refinement.*
- **Recommendation 2:** *That the Australian and State and Territory Governments (through COAG) develop and establish a cross sector working party to develop a Nationally Consistent Leaving Care Framework with a focus on tackling homelessness for young people exiting the care system.*
- **Recommendation 3:** *That both the Queensland and Victorian Government develop a comprehensive housing policy for young care leavers, including improved referral pathways between Child Protection services and Public Housing services.*
- **Recommendation 4:** *That the Australian Government commission a national research study to examine and explore the intersection of young care leavers and intergenerational homelessness.*

1. BACKGROUND

The Australian Government's White Paper on homelessness *The Road Home* identified young adults making the transition from care as a group likely to experience periods of homelessness (Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs [FaHCSIA], 2008). Since this report was released researchers have built on our understanding of how leaving care can place young people at risk of social exclusion due to homelessness (see for example, AIHW, 2012a; Heerde, Hemphill, Broderick & Florent, 2012; Johnson, Natalier, Bailey, Mendes, Kunned, Liddiard, Hollows & Bailey, 2010; Johnson, Natalier, Liddiard & Thoresen, 2011). Support at such transition points can have a preventative effect (Johnson et al., 2010; Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2006; Wade & Dixon, 2006), and can be considered as opportunities for early and/ or timely intervention in respect of homelessness. Recent research is beginning to identify characteristics of successful programs to support young people making the move to adulthood, including enhancing their ability to secure appropriate housing (Brown & Wilderson, 2010; McCluskey, 2010; Mendes, Johnson & Moslehuddin, 2011a; Stein, 2012; Tilbury, 2011). This research aims to contribute to this endeavour.

The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) contains 4 core outputs for states and territories, one of which is *assistance for people leaving child protection, jail and health facilities, to access and maintain stable, affordable housing* (FaHCSIA, 2008). Four National Homelessness Research Partnerships were funded, and this Project has been undertaken by Queensland University of Technology as one research activity within the partnership led by Swinburne University of Technology's *Institute for Social Research*. Our focus has been on young people leaving the child protection system or statutory care who have been identified as at risk of experiencing poor life transitions, one of the main pathways into homelessness (Cashmore & Paxman, 1996; Maunders, Liddell, Liddell & Green, 1999). Children and young people can be homeless before coming into care, whilst in care (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2012a; Dworsky & Courtney, 2009) and post care. There is a strong research evidence base that consistently shows that young people leaving state care are more likely to experience homelessness. Osborn and Bromfield (2007) reviewed Australian research studies from 1994 to 2006, which demonstrated that close to half of young people experienced periods of homelessness after they left care. McDowall (2009) identified that approximately one third of young people reported being homeless in the first year after leaving care.

This study examined young people's post care experiences in terms of homelessness and risk of homelessness and was particularly interested in their accounts of what was helpful or needed to avert them from the pathway to homelessness. Our work is informed by the pathways approach which, as developed by Johnson, Natalier, Liddiard, and Thoresen (2011), not only assists research into interactions amongst a wide constellation of individual characteristics and social structures and process but more importantly, allows for analysis of both "objective and subjective dimensions of housing ... in the broader context of the interaction with other individuals and institutions" (p.142; see also Mendes, Johnson & Moslehuddin, 2011b).

The pathways approach also marries well with concerns raised by research into placement histories of young people in care. As detailed in the following literature review, findings consistently point to the importance of quality and stability as central to the well-being of children and young people in care and leaving care (Stein & Dumaret, 2011). For example Cashmore and Paxman (1996) in their longitudinal study of care leavers found that the more placements a young person had while in care, the more places they lived in after leaving care. Follow-up studies added that while stability of placement was a significant predictor of after-care outcomes, a more substantial effect is seen when young peoples' sense of 'felt security' was accounted for (Cashmore & Paxman, 2006a, p.21). Children and young people who experience stability in care have opportunities to develop relationships with direct carers and others, this in turn promotes well-being across a range of life domains (Bromfield, Higgins, Osborn, Panozzo & Richardson, 2005). As Tilbury and Osmond (2006) note, when living arrangements are stable children and young people can experience continuity in peer networks, community activities, school and service providers.

These studies underscore how vital it is that young people's subjective experiences are taken into account. It is also important to hear from young people so we can learn more about their agency and resilience in securing and maintaining accommodation following homelessness (Stein, 2012) and elicit their feedback on whether the supports designed to assist them were accessible and worthwhile (Mendes et al., 2011a). Developing a better understanding of which supports are effective or useful when a young person is homeless or at risk of homelessness can better inform early intervention models.

While the amount known about the trajectories of young people leaving care that lead them into homelessness is limited we are building a better sense of the broad patterns in young people's experiences. Our study aims to add to this understanding by detailing young people's narratives of in care and post care with particular attention paid to any experiences of homelessness broadly defined. We draw on concepts from pathways approaches in considering how young people's transition may be typified variously as 'smooth' or 'volatile' (Johnson et al., 2010). Research by Johnson and his colleagues (2010) identified that the housing experiences and outcomes of young people with a volatile transition were characterised by poor experiences of supported or transitional accommodation, a lack of professional and peer support and difficulties in maintaining accommodation and independence. In contrast, a 'smooth' transition was typified by features such as having early success with placements and fewer placements, feeling secure in care, participating in planning and leaving care at a later age. Our analysis is also informed by the work of Stein (2012) who describes three groups that young people broadly fit into when leaving care, but may also move between. These are: those 'moving on' from care who tend to be stable and have gained control over their lives; the 'survivors' who saw themselves as self-reliant and doing well despite adversity; and the 'strugglers' who experienced more maltreatment prior to care and continued to be disadvantaged and have high needs related to both physical and mental health (pp.170-172).

As proposed, we have conducted a small scoping study that has examined the experiences of young people (aged 19 to 23) in the period following their exit from statutory care, with particular regard to homelessness. Johnson et al. (2010) argue that the role and importance of housing has rarely

been investigated in any systematic manner in regards to young people leaving care. Therefore we were interested in identifying how their housing situation intersected with life domains such as education and financial supports. We have focused on young people's post care experiences in two states, Victoria and Queensland. These states have been selected as they reflect different approaches to post-care support and so allow for a level of comparative analysis to be undertaken. Young people's reports have been contextualised via analysis of post care support available in these two states. This analysis not only offers a descriptive account of the state of play with respect to legislation and service provision in each state but also provides a backdrop against which to analyse the policy and practice implications of experiences of young people with respect to homelessness and transitioning from care. Recommendations are made regarding subsequent research needed in order to develop more effective practice approaches which achieve preventive and early intervention outcomes. This will include investigation of the establishment of action research strategies to explore critical areas for practice development.

This research would not have been possible without the support of the young care leavers who graciously told us their stories and opinions. In this regard we were fortunate to partner with CREATE Foundation (the peak consumer organisation for children and young people with a statutory care experience). CREATE contributed to the research by providing advice and feedback at all stages of the project, recruiting and screening the young people to be involved, facilitating and recording focus group meetings and providing invaluable support to the young people participating in the project.

The report begins with a literature review of extant research, particularly Australian studies, that provides demographic information and conceptual focus for this study on homelessness following exit from state care. We then describe the study methodology. The results of the audit of legislation, policy and programs are presented first to provide a context for the presentation of data from young people about their experiences of homelessness post care as well as their experiences and ideas about what did help or would have helped. Finally we report service provider views about transition from care support, discuss the data and draw out key implications for policy and practice.

Leaving care

In 2012 there were an estimated 39,621 Australian children and young people in out of home care (AIHW, 2013). Of the children and young people in out of home care 6,207 were in Victoria and 8,000 were in Queensland. It is estimated nearly 1400 children in both states have recently transitioned from care (Vic n=857, Qld n=518) (AIHW, 2013, pp.76-77).

Generally, when a young person leaves the out of home care system they also lose access to formal support services associated with being in care. A significant amount of the transition literature likens the process of transitioning from care to jumping with no safety net, as if the doors to out-of-home care will be closed and locked behind the young person in transition (Cashmore & Paxman, 2006b; Dworsky, Dillman, Dion, Coffee-Borden & Rosenau, 2012; Greenen & Powers, 2007; Johnson

et al., 2010; Moslehuddin & Mendes, 2007). This watershed is created by the legal definition of 'child' in child protection legislation as people under the age of 18. Formal care arrangements, carer compensation and case worker resources are some of the resources generally withdrawn once a young person reaches the age of majority (Cashmore & Paxman, 2007; McDowall, 2011; Mendes et al., 2011b). This process of 'aging out' can be a daunting experience for young people (Stein, 2012). As young adults more generally in the Australian population have increasingly relied on parental resources into young adulthood, evidenced by extended periods of time spent in education and training, and delayed average ages of home leaving and partnering, so the inadequacy of ceasing the support of the state as guardian or care provider at 18 years has become more apparent.

For young people growing up in child protection, moving from care can place them at risk of unemployment, poverty, drug addiction, unwanted pregnancy and homelessness (Cashmore & Paxman, 2006a; Natalier & Johnson, 2012). The nexus between leaving care and homelessness does not exist is isolation from a young person's in care experience. Cashmore and Paxman (2006b; 2007) found young people who had 'stability in care' were less mobile after care, had more and wider support resources four to five years after leaving care. This also applied to the young people who felt secure whilst in care. They found evidence for a strong positive correlation between felt security in care, placement stability in care, stability of accommodation after care and social support after care (Cashmore & Paxman, 2006b). Stein (2005, 2012) also identifies factors that taken together can result in young people leaving care and experiencing, among other things, homelessness. Stein examined resilience and young people leaving care and found that young people who experienced a higher degree of instability, movement and disruption whilst in care were more likely to experience post care problems such as homelessness and difficulties maintaining accommodation (2005).

These studies provide strong evidence for concluding that efforts to prevent post leaving care homelessness must attend to a young person's in care experience, and their journey across the constructed categories of in, leaving and post care.

Leaving care and homelessness

Numerous studies report that young people leaving care have a high risk of experiencing later homelessness. Studies reviewed by Dworsky and Courtney (2009) indicate that about one third of young people leaving care will experience homelessness. CREATE Foundation's 2009 Report Card found approximately 40% of young people did not know where they would be living upon leaving care (McDowall, 2009). McDowall (2009) also found that 35% of the survey respondents had experienced homelessness within the first 12 months of leaving statutory care. Cashmore and Paxman's (2006a; 2007) longitudinal study found that almost 50% of their study sample had experienced homelessness within 5 years of leaving state care. This is similar to Forbes, Inder and Raman's (2006) finding that 45% of their sample of 60 young people experienced homelessness. They also found that 36% had moved more than 5 times in the previous 12 months. Thoresen and Liddiard (2011) found that 64% of their sample of 77 care leavers had experienced primary homelessness at some stage and 95% had experienced some form of homeless, such as spending

time in friends' homes or short-term housing. Overall, studies demonstrate that a substantial proportion of young people leaving care experience some form of homelessness post care.

As *The Road Home* White Paper states, "a stable home provides safety and security as well as connections to friends, family and a community" (FaHCSIA, 2008, p.3). However, it can be difficult to access housing as a range of forces in the housing market and care leaver's lives can result in affordability stress and housing instability (Gronda, Ware & Vitis, 2011). The affordability of the private rental market for people on low incomes is poor with income support payments and minimum wages being insufficient to cover costs (Anglicare, 2013). The public housing market is experiencing substantial social residualisation where increasingly public or social housing is only available for people on government welfare and who have high needs (Jacobs, Atkinson, Colic-Peisker, Berry, & Dalton, 2010). This means that accessing both private and public housing can be difficult for young people leaving out-of-home care who generally do not have the option of staying on with their care family (Natalier & Johnson, 2012), and in the great majority of cases have insufficient contact with their family of origin for a flow of post care support to be likely. A survey of 2754 Queensland children in care 9 to 18 years found that most (81%) reported never having returned home to their birth family (Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, 2013).

Raman and her colleagues (2005) used a resilience framework to explain the economic costs of not supporting young care leavers. They found that the most significant factor in positive outcomes was a case plan based on stable accommodation (p.37). They noted the many connections between having stable accommodation and other outcomes related to education, employment. However, only just over 50% of young care leavers had case plans that included stable accommodation. They also point to the social and cultural phenomena of an extended and delayed adulthood (p.52). Nearly 30% of Australian 18-34 year olds continue to live with one or both parents (ABS, 2013) and, in 2006-7 21.9% of 20-34 year olds had left home and returned at least once (ABS, 2009). For their sample of 60 young people they found a high level of instability in accommodation with 35% having moved more than five times in the previous year, nearly half (45%) were in temporary or transitional housing, and 10% were homeless (Raman et al., 2005, p.22).

Johnson and colleagues (2010) in a study of 77 young people who left care found two distinct groups, those who had experienced a smooth transition and those whose transition was volatile. The results showed that the young people who experienced volatility had left care at a younger age and experienced instability in both social relationships and housing (2010; see also Natalier & Johnson, 2012; Johnson et al., 2011). Young people who experienced a volatile transition were twice as likely not to have a transition plan.

Partial implementation of policy directives regarding transition planning is also reported in CREATE Report Cards (McDowall, 2011, 2013). The 2011 Report Card investigated transitioning for 605 young people aged 15 to 17 and found that approximately 70% of the young people did not have a transition plan or did not have any knowledge of a transition plan (McDowall, 2011). The most recent CREATE Report Card shows little change - "only a third of the older age group knew of any

form of 'leaving care' or transition plans being prepared for them ... and half of these had been involved in its preparation" (McDowall, 2013, p.xxiii). This is despite legislation and practice guidelines indicating the necessity of transition planning from out-of-home care in order to avoid, among other things, homelessness. It is also despite the Australian White Paper (2008) introducing a policy of "no exits into homelessness" from statutory care (FaHCSIA, 2008, p. 27).

Current research and policy demonstrates that young people leaving care are very vulnerable to homelessness. Significant needs and support gaps have been identified for care leavers who have disabilities, mental health issues, and substance use issues as highlighted by Mendes (2012) and others. This vulnerability is compounded for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Conceptualising homelessness

Although there are some empirical studies on young adults' post care experiences of homelessness there is a need to develop a better understanding of how in-care and post-care support is conceptualised and made available so as to prevent homelessness (Heerde et al., 2012). As Kellett and Moore (2003) propose, definitions of homelessness are shaped by political and cultural forces which are socially contested and different to the perspectives of those experiencing homelessness (p.125; see also Moore, McArthur & Noble-Carr, 2008).

In Australia there is wide support for the cultural relativity definition of homelessness that was refined by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992, 2006). Chamberlain and MacKenzie state that "homeless is a relative concept that acquires meaning in relation to the housing conventions of a particular culture" (p.290). The model distinguishes between primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness. Primary (or absolute) homelessness includes sleeping on the streets, in improvised dwellings, and in deserted buildings (ABS, 2006; Homelessness Australia, n.d.), secondary homelessness includes living in temporary and emergency accommodation, refuges or moving between friends or family houses, commonly referred to as couch surfing (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006; Homelessness Australia, n.d.), and tertiary homelessness is that which "falls below minimum community standards" and includes living in boarding houses on a medium to long term basis and some use of caravan parks (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2006).

Our understanding of the concept of homelessness is further advanced by the notion of homeless having temporal dimensions, that is that homelessness is a process that occurs over time rather than simply an event or status (see Chamberlain and Mackenzie 1994). This recognition of temporal processes that underpin homelessness becoming more entrenched for some people underpinned the logic for early intervention which emerged in the late 1980's and 1990's (Crane et al. 1996) and since in the development of an interest in identifying various 'pathways' to homelessness. One such pathway to homelessness is via child abuse and out of home care.

As Crane et al. (1996) suggest, for young people in-care and post-care we may see a similar pattern of “transience and multiple care givers that ...meets the definitional requirements of homelessness in some important respects” (p. 9).

A different view of homelessness is suggested by theorists who propose a more interpretative stance. For example, Mallett (2004) outlined the multidimensional concept of ‘home’ as being “a repository for complex, inter-related, contradictory socio-cultural ideas about people’s relationships with one another, especially family and with places, spaces and things” (p.84). Previously Crane and colleagues (1996) found that young people who had some experience of homelessness defined home “by their experience of it, through qualities that are largely felt, such as feeling safe and through the way others treat them, such as being listened to” (p.65)

It is here that the notion of ‘felt homelessness’ has relevance (Crane et al., 1996). As noted by the ABS (2012), homelessness can include living arrangements that do not allow people to have “control of and access to space for social relations”, a perspective informed by the understanding that homelessness is a lack of one or more of the elements that represent ‘home’ (p.7).

Leaving care practice

There is an emerging literature on what could be termed leaving care practice. That is, what models of service and character of practice are effective in supporting young people transition from care to wellbeing in their adult lives. Such work platforms on a broader literature from various vantage points including child protection practice, youth homelessness early intervention practice, and a broader literature on connecting young people to family, education, work and community. Recently in Australia there have been a number of studies and service evaluations which have generated general and specific characteristics of appropriate and effective leaving care service delivery (for example Mendes 2011, Mendes, Johnson and Moslehuddin 2011, Tilbury 2011, Stein 2012).

In terms of resources, the Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) together with the National Framework for Protecting Children’s Implementation Working Group have produced a good practice resource to inform transition planning (FaHCSIA & NFPCHIWG, 2011). This document aims to promote best practice and consistency. Housing is clearly identified as one of the most important elements for transition planning: Housing / accommodation tops the general list of areas that should be covered in a transition from care plan (pp.3 & 10), the life domains identified in stakeholder consultations (p.7) and is the first mentioned ‘focus’ in both transition and after care phases of the proposed planning process (p.9).

This research asks in respect of Victoria and Queensland ‘What happens when young people leave state care?’ and what are the service support implications of this. We address this question primarily

by asking young adults who have left care and have experienced homelessness during or post leaving care about their experiences, what has assisted them, and what they think is needed in terms of support. In analysing their accounts we are mindful of the complex range of factors that can shape their experience of home and homelessness, thus contributing to smooth or volatile transitions. We were particularly interested in what they perceived as useful with respect to formal and informal supports so that the research could contribute to practice and policy improvement to better address these children's right to find 'the road home'.

2. PURPOSE

The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) contains 4 core outputs, one of which is *assistance for people leaving child protection ... to access and maintain stable, affordable housing*. Four National Homelessness Research Partnerships were funded, and this Project has been undertaken by Queensland University of Technology as one research activity within the partnership led by Swinburne University of Technology's *Institute for Social Research*.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the understanding of policy and practice in respect of young people leaving care with specific reference to prevention of homelessness. This scoping study focuses on two states, namely Victoria and Queensland, and seeks to draw on the experiences of young adults who have recently left care to inform future directions in research, policy and practice.

3. OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of the ‘What happens when young people leave state care?’ research project was to examine in detail what happens when young people leave care in respect of homelessness. The research questions were:

- 1 What is the post care experience of young people who leave care in terms of homelessness and risk of homelessness? This was examined in terms of:
 - their access to, and experience of accommodation/ housing,
 - any experiences of homelessness,
 - engagement in education, training and/ or work,
 - engagement with own social support networks, including family or origin (broadly defined), and other social and community networks,
 - experiences of personal vulnerability and need,
 - engagement with social services of various kinds,
 - sources of economic support,
 - the support received from state care agencies as part of transition from care support,
 - other experiences they consider important to their post care wellbeing.
- 2 What do young people with a care experience who have been homeless (whether this be pre or post leaving care) consider was or would have been useful in their case?
- 3 What are the practice and policy implications of the research findings for both in care policies and practice, and post care policy and practice?
- 4 How can further investigation of post care experiences be structured so as to inform enhanced policy and practice for transition from and post care experience?

4. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative methodology and used interviews and focus groups to gather data from young people who had experienced homelessness, and professionals with knowledge of the service system. Ethics approval was gained early in November 2012 from the QUT Research Ethics Committee (approval number 1200000504). The CREATE Foundation assisted with reviewing literature and recruitment of young people who had left care, and liaising with other service providers. Data was gathered in both Queensland and Victoria.

Thematic analysis (Carey,2012), assisted with the use of NVivo software, focused on identifying young adults' post care experiences of finding housing or being homeless and gaining a more grounded empirical understanding of beneficial service characteristics or components. To inform the analysis of young peoples' experiences we also conducted a series of individual interviews and group consultations with professionals and staff at services working with young care leavers. These stakeholders also provided valuable information regarding the service system so that we could analyse the supports available to young people. Overall, the research was designed to build understanding of the housing experiences of young adults leaving care and the kinds of processes and resources needed to meet their housing needs.

Data collection and analysis

Four strategies were used to collect data:

1. Semi-structured interviews with 27 young adults (19-23 years old);
2. Focus groups with young people;
3. Focus groups and interviews with professionals and staff of services working with young care leavers ;
4. Analysis of post care support available to the young people in Queensland and Victoria.

The research was designed so that each phase of data collection would inform subsequent data gathering and analysis. In this way comparing and cross-checking emergent themes from young peoples' reports of experiences of homelessness informed the conversations we had with service stakeholders which in turn assisted with the mapping of the post care service system (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Individual interviews

Participant recruitment was facilitated by CREATE Foundation who used a range of strategies to encourage young care leavers to volunteer including online notices, information provided at other events and emails to their distribution lists. A screening tool was developed to identify appropriate volunteers, focusing on recruiting care leavers who had a homelessness experience and the ethical requirement for participants to be at least 19 years old (see Appendix A: Screening tool).

Overall 44 individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 27 individuals (22 in Queensland and 22 in Victoria) aged between 19 and 23 years old (see Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Schedules). Two waves of interviews were conducted over a four month period: Time 1 in November/December 2012 and Time 2 March/April 2013. As anticipated there was some attrition however we were able to reconnect with 17 of these young people for the second set of interviews (8 in Qld and 9 in Vic). We also conducted a 'combined' interview with seven additional young

people who either volunteered or were recruited to include the voices of young people from a diverse range of backgrounds (esp. Indigenous and CALD young people). Due to time constraints we only conducted one interview using questions selected from both interview schedules.

Interviews lasted between 40 and 80 minutes and were audio-taped and fully transcribed. Most interviews were undertaken face-to-face with four conducted via telephone. Participants received a \$40 shopping voucher for each interview. The young people variously resided in inner city, suburban and regional locations. Most participants (22 of the 27 young people) were female. See Table 1 for more information.

Interviews were designed to elicit the young adults' experience of being in care and post care in respect of homelessness, their experiences of helpful and unhelpful support, and suggestions about what else would have helped and when that help should have been available. This juxtaposing of their personal pathway and support given and needed forms the empirical basis of the study.

The first interview (Time 1) covered:

- Current housing situation (type of accommodation/housing/homelessness);
- Accommodation/housing/homelessness experiences since leaving care;
- Experiences of care (number and type of placements, total length of time in care);
- General questions about their post-care experience of life domains, such as education and training, employment, financial securing and health;
- Young adult's perspectives on what had assisted them when, both pre-and post-care; and
- Their perspective on what they thought was needed to prevent homelessness for young people leaving care.

A 'Timeline Template' was designed to enable a shared, visual representation of the information provided by the young adult during the interview. It was printed on a A3 sheet (see Figure 1 below). While the young people were invited to use this in all instances the interviewer was asked to take the notes. This template device worked well as a way of engaging young people in a directed conversation about their experiences and views, and as a tool for clarifying the complexity in their narrative.

Figure 1: Timeline Template

Living Situations	
LEFT CARE	NOW

What was helpful and unhelpful

The second interview (Time 2): We had originally proposed to conduct the follow-up interviews 6-8 months after the first interviews but this proved not possible due to delays with arranging for ethics clearance.

The second interview began by checking with the young person that we had correctly recorded key points of their experience. We then asked questions about their current circumstances focusing on accommodation, and probed about aspects of their lives that had changed in the intervening months. To ensure we had information about actual supports they accessed we designed questions about any service(s) that they had contact with since the first interview and we also asked about informal and family supports. Following this empirical exercise we asked for young people's ideas about what a service for young care leavers should look like. Several open ended questions were followed by a series of closed or fixed response questions that checked for their views on a number of specific features or principles that were drawn both from the first wave of interviews and the literature about effective early intervention and prevention of homelessness.

The Combined interview, as noted above, was just for new participants at Time 2. Our proposal stated a target sample size of 40 and so we were willing to modify our strategy to gather more participants. This flexibility was also possible within existing ethics approvals.

The combined interview schedule contained first interview questions about current situation and accommodation since leaving care as well as questions about their placement experiences in care and post-care experiences with respect to life domains. Of particular interest were accounts of leaving care and other services they accessed and whether these were useful. We also were interested in informal support networks and relationships that contributed to their ability to maintain accommodation. Finally the combined interview presented the fixed response questions about service features and principles as asked at the end of the Second (Time 2) interview.

These interviews were analysed to draw out the range of experiences with respect to moving into and out of homelessness. We also identified factors reported by these young people, specifically with respect to finding and maintaining secure accommodation. We listened closely to their views about what was helpful for them with respect to formal and informal supports as well as capturing their sense of agency in the process of building a life after care.

The profile of the young people interviewed in the two states was broadly similar, as depicted in Table 1 below. The age of Queensland respondents was a little younger and therefore closer to the point of formally transitioning from care. The majority of participants were female (n=22). There were five males, three Indigenous young women and two young people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse [CALD] backgrounds. Two participants identified as having a disability. Of particular note, 16 of the 27 (nearly 60%) disclosed mental health issues.

Table 1 Profile of interview participants

DEMOGRAPHICS	Total (n=27)	Qld (n=13)	Victoria (n=14)
Gender	Female = 22, Male = 5	Female = 10, Male =3	Female = 12, Male =2
Age (19-23yrs)	19yrs= 11 20yrs= 6 21yrs=2 22yrs= 5 23yrs= 3	19yrs= 7 20yrs= 3 21yrs= 1 22yrs= 1 23yrs= 1	19yrs= 4 20yrs= 3 21yrs=1 22yrs= 4 23yrs= 2
Location of interview		Brisbane Metropolitan= 7 Logan/Eagleby= 3 Toowoomba= 3	Melbourne Metropolitan = 12 Sale (Regional)= 1 Geelong=1
Identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background	3	1	2
Identify as CALD	2	1	1
Indicate a disability	2	1 (Intellectual disability)	1
Completed year level of school	Year 12 = 11 Year 11=4 Year 10 = 4 Year 9 = 2 Year 7 = 1 Year 5 =1 N/A = 4	Year 12 = 5 Year 11 = 3 Year 10 = 2 Year 7 = 1 N/A = 2	Year 12 = 6 Year 11=1 Year 10 = 2 Year 9 = 2 Year 5 =1 N/A = 2
Relationship status	Currently living with partner= 11	Currently living with partner = 5	Currently living with partner= 6
Parental Status (number with children)	6	2	4
Financial income status (employed/ receiving government benefits)	Centrelink Benefits= 20 Employed= 8	Centrelink Benefits= 10 Employed= 4	Centrelink Benefits= 10 Employed= 4
Mental health issues (self disclosed)	16	6 Depression= 3 Anxiety= 1 Schizophrenia = 1 Attempted suicide=1	10 Borderline Personality Disorder = 4 Depression= 2 Attempted suicide= 2 Accessed counseling= 2
Drugs and Alcohol substance use/problems (self disclosed)	7	4	3
Involvement with youth justice system (self disclosed)	5	1 previously in a Queensland Youth Detention centre	4, 2 of whom previously in a Victorian Youth Detention centre

Focus groups with young people

Focus groups were held after the first series of interviews and helped build a sense of key themes in the experience of these informants with respect to seeking and maintaining housing (Bagnoli & Clark, 2010). Focus group feedback and discussion assisted with the generation of both open ended and closed response format questions in the second interviews. A list of ideas about how to prevent homelessness was generated from these meetings and practices checked with participants at the second interview (see Appendix C: What helps prevent homelessness chart).

A total of 21 individuals participated in 6 focus groups held across metropolitan and regional locations in Queensland and Victoria in February and April 2013. We originally proposed just 2 groups with 6-10 participants but as can be seen from the numbers below we needed to schedule more groups to reach our target of 20 participants.

Our CREATE partners recruited participants and organised, facilitated and recorded notes about these groups that involved 3-7 young people in activities and discussions about leaving care and homelessness. Each participant received a shopping voucher for \$30.

Victorian focus groups were held in February 2013:

- Geelong (13th Feb) **n=4**, all male;
- Bendigo (14th Feb) **n=3**, all female;
- North Melbourne (15th Feb) **n=2**, 1 female and 1 male.

Queensland focus groups were held in February and April 2013:

- Inala (21st February) **n=7** , 5 male, 3 female.
- Toowoomba (28th February) **n=2**, all female (1 with disability).
- Brisbane (30th April) **n=3** (1 male, 2 female (1 with disability)).

Data from focus group participants has been analysed and reported in conjunction with themes and concepts generated from the interview data.

Both individual interviews and focus groups were conducted with young adults and there were similar **ethical considerations**. Principally we wanted to ensure that the young people were not placed under any undue stress during the interview or focus group. One way we addressed this risk was to provide the participation voucher at the beginning of the interview or focus group so that they did not feel under any financial duress to continue if they experienced discomfort or for any other reason wished to discontinue. The other support we offered was a one page handout along with the participant information sheet that contained contact details of a wide range of services and supports that could be accessed if a specific concern arose. Another important ethical concern was ensuring confidentiality and therefore we do not disclose any identifying details of participants in either interviews or focus groups, including specific names of agencies where they receive services except when large government (e.g. DHS in Victoria) or non-government (e.g. CREATE) agencies are discussed in a context that would not identify the participant.

In addition to discussions with young people regarding their experience we also spoke with professionals and staff at a range of services working with young care leavers.

Focus groups and interviews with professionals and staff at services working with young care leavers

In March and April, 2013, a series of individual and small group meetings were held with key stakeholders to gather their knowledge and practice wisdom about:

1. In care and post care supports available to young people (for example, youth services and more general government supports such as Centrelink); and
2. Critical areas for practice development in terms of understanding and addressing in care and post care experiences of young adults with respect to preventing and responding to homelessness.

See Appendix D for a list of participating agencies.

In Victoria there were two meetings (one with 7 attendees and the other with 2) with non-government family services personnel and staff from leaving care programs as well as other interested parties such as representatives from residential services and youth services. Individual meetings were held with four others including a representative from the Department of Human Services and an Indigenous leaving care worker.

In Queensland 12 people attended a stakeholder meeting. Services represented included agencies providing out-of-home care services as well as youth services and community mental health services. Individual conversations were had with four other stakeholders including a child safety representative from the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services and a peak body representative.

The policy and practice feedback and advice from these participants was essential to connecting ideas from the young people to the broader policy and service system issues faced by the sector. For example, we gained a broader perspective on important supports such as transitional housing. In this way, these conversations informed analysis of recommendations made by the young people and provided support for the final data collection stage of mapping the service system.

Analysis of post care support

This phase of data collection involved collecting and collating information about legislation, programs and services in each State designed to support young people as they make the transition from care, with a focus on accommodation supports. This mapping of the service systems is particularly useful in identifying emerging practice and gaps in the system (Delgado & Humm-Delgado, 2013). Information was sought and provided by the respective state government departments, NGO peak bodies for out-of-home care, and the respective state-wide agencies providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection advocacy and service support.

Limitations

The study is necessarily small and qualitative. There are insufficient numbers of respondent young people to generalise about young people leaving care or to draw more than tentative conclusions regarding practice in the two states they reside in. Further it is beyond the scope of this study to drill

down into various specific support needs particular cohorts young people leaving care may present, for example young people leaving care who have mental health and/ or substance use issues.

Using both interviews and focus groups, and conducting two interviews with several months gap between these, assisted in developing a clearer and more robust understanding of young people's experiences than would otherwise have been possible. The sample was purposive and relied on young people responding to various forms of request to participate. Despite some level of participation, the sample does not reflect the desired diversity in respect of numbers of young people with disabilities, young men, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. A sample more heavily involving these young people may well have identified other experiences and views.

5. RESULTS

This section begins by describing the current service context with a focus on the post care support arrangement and supports for young people leaving care. The Victorian and Queensland systemic approaches to transition from care are presented along with legislative arrangements, policies, programs and services.

The next section reports on the experience of young people from in care to post care. We begin by reporting their views on the concept of home. We then relate their accounts of in care experiences, including experiences of homelessness whilst in care and then move to reporting their post care experiences. We tease out connections between their access to, and experience of accommodation/housing and experiences of homelessness. We consider how factors such as engagement in education, social and community supports have contributed to their post care wellbeing. We also identify the support received from state care agencies as part of transition from care support.

Illustrative case studies are inserted throughout to demonstrate how these factors play out in the lives of young people leaving care. We then report the opinions of young people on transition and post care support: What do they consider would have been useful in their case?

Current service contexts and post care supports

The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020

On 30 April 2009, the National Framework was endorsed by the Council of Australian Government (COAG), which demonstrated Commonwealth, state and territory governments and non-government organisations commitment to achieving a substantial and sustained reduction in child abuse and neglect in Australia (FaHCSIA, 2008). The National Framework is underpinned by the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and advocates for a public health model that pays more attention to prevention and early intervention. There are six supporting outcomes to protect children and young people:

1. Children live in safe and supportive families and communities;
2. Children and families access adequate support to promote safety and intervene early;
3. Risk Factors for child abuse and neglect are addressed;
4. Children who have been abused or neglected receive the support and care they need for their safety and wellbeing;
5. Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities;
6. Child sexual abuse and exploitation is prevented and survivors receive adequate support.

As part of the First Action Plan 2009-2012, a number of achievements were made including the development of the *National Standards for Out of Home Care*, which were designed to improve the quality of care of services provided to children and young people who are in the care system (FaHCSIA, 2011). There are 13 Standards, of which Standard 13 is about having a 'Transition from Care' plan (TFC) which is defined as:

A planned and phased approach to transitioning from care for young people that identifies the required supports, based on individual needs, in areas such as safe and sustainable housing, education, employment, financial security, social relationships and support networks, health – physical, emotional (including self-esteem and identity), mental and sexual, and life and after care skills. (p.26)

The National Standards require that each young person is to have a TFC plan commencing at the age of 15 years, which includes details of support to access relevant services and is reviewed regularly. All state and territory governments will be required to report the following:

- 13.1: The proportion of young people aged 15 years and over who have a current leaving care plan.
- 13.2: The proportion of young people who, at the time of exit from out-of-home care, report they are receiving adequate assistance to prepare for adult life.

Another key achievement of the First Action Plan was the development of the online resource 'Transitioning from out-of-home care to Independence: a Nationally Consistent Approach to Planning' (October 2011), which aims to improve consistency across jurisdictions by outlining best practice in leaving-care planning. In 2012 an overview of elements of good practice called *Supporting young people transitioning from out-of-home care to independence in Australia: Good practice in 2011/12* was published by the Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs together with the National Framework for Protecting Children's Working Group (FaHSCIA & NFWIG, 2012).

The Second Three Year Action Plan, 2012-2015 (the Second Action Plan) of the National Framework retains a focus on young people transitioning from care to independence (COAG, 2012). The aim is to ensure appropriate support for young people leaving care to secure their social and economic independence into the future. The focus is on better integration of support for young people leaving care as well as appropriate housing options. There are a number of editorial corrections to be made in the section

The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness

The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) aims to implement the agenda outlined in the White Paper. The NPAH identifies "children and young people including those subject to or exiting care and protection" as a target group for reducing homelessness (COAG, 2008, p.3). It seeks, among other things, to "assist young people aged 12 to 18 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to re-engage with their family where it is safe to do so, maintain sustainable accommodation and engage with education and employment" (COAG, 2008, p.5). The NPAH contributes to the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) which commenced on 1 January 2009.

Relevant Commonwealth specialist programs oriented to connecting young people to family, education and training, work, and/or community include Reconnect, Youth Connections and mental health initiatives such as Headspace.

Victorian leaving care provisions

In Victoria, leaving care provisions are legislated in the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*, which outlines the provision of leaving care and after care services for young people up to 21 years of age. The Act obliges the Victorian Government to assist care leavers with: finances, housing, education and training, employment, legal advice, access to health and community services and counselling support.

In 2011, the Victorian Government the *Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry* (PVVCI) was undertaken, with the final report tabled in Parliament on 28 February 2012. As part of this the PVVCI examined the experiences of children and young people leaving out of home care. In recent years the Department of Human Services (DHS) has developed and implemented specific leaving care and post-care services and programs (as outlined in Table 2 below), with nearly \$4million funding allocated annually for leaving care services covering: post-care support; information and referral, mentoring and financial assistance. The Inquiry made the following recommendations (p.lvi):

- Recommendation 28:
The Department of Human Services should collect regular information on the experiences of young people leaving care and their access to leaving care and post-care services and report the initial findings to the Minister in 2012 and thereafter on an annual basis to the proposed Commission for Children and Young People.
- Recommendation 29:
The Department of Human Services should have the capacity, including funding capacity, to extend the current home-based care and residential care out-of-home care placement and support arrangements, on a voluntary and needs basis, for individual young people beyond 18years of age.
- Recommendation 30:
The Department of Human Services should:
 - *Ensure all leaving care plans identify stable initial accommodation options and that a 'no discharge to temporary and inappropriate accommodation policy' is adopted.*
 - *Review the levels and range of leaving and post-care financial assistance provided to care leavers, as part of the development and implementation of the proposed Leaving Care Employment and Education Access Program, including appropriate representations to the Commonwealth Government on their current employment and education assistance programs; and*
 - *Assess the impact of the current leaving care services and programs, as a matter of priority, to determine whether the necessary access to and integration of post care support across the full range of health, housing and other services is being achieved.*
- Recommendation 31:
The Government should consider, in the medium term, the availability of post-care support and periodic follow-up being extended, on a needs basis, until a young person reaches the age of 25years.

The Department of Human Services Victoria indicated to this study it is committed to further understanding the in care and post care experience of young people holistically across a number of domains and vulnerability to homelessness is one of these domains. To this end Victoria is investing in the *Beyond 18* longitudinal study on leaving care and is developing a 5 year plan for children in out-of-home care. The plans were committed to in the Victoria's *Vulnerable Children's Strategy* and associated directions paper.

The following table depicts the key elements of the Victorian transition from care approach at the time of writing.

Table 2: Victorian leaving care provisions

	Description	Client group/ Focus	Process Description
Legislation	<i>Child Youth and Family Act 2005</i> (Vic)	Statutory obligation Department of Human Services	S16 (4). The kinds of services that may be provided to support a person to make the transition to Independent living include- a) the provision of information about available resources and services; b) depending on the Secretary's assessment of need – i) financial assistance; ii) assistance in obtaining accommodation or setting up residence; iii) assistance with education and training iv) assistance in finding employment v) assistance in obtaining legal advice vi) assistance in gaining access to health and community services c) Counselling and support
Policy	Leaving Care (under the <i>Looking After Children Framework</i>)	Young people 16-21 who are leaving or have left Care in Victoria.	State and community partnership to ensure a holistic approach to young people leaving the out of home care system to successfully move into independence.
	Transition Planning (as part of the <i>Looking After Children (LAC) Framework</i> and <i>Vulnerable Children's Strategy</i>)	Required for children and young people when a decision has been made that the child/young person will leave the placement to return home, go to another placement or move to live independently	The Care and Placement Plan and the review/ record process is used to develop and monitor the Transition Plan or Leaving Care Plan. In some cases a more detailed Leaving Care Plan may be developed as an attachment to the Care and Placement Plan. Transition planning with the young person must begin at least six months prior to the move to independent living. Transition planning has to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stability of living arrangement after the young person leaves care • Educational/employment pathways • Health (social and sexual) • Life skills and community connections •
Services	Government and community sector	21 Community Service Organisations (CSO's) funded to	Holistic approach to ensure young person has post care access to: *Case management support

	alliance to ensure transition support, information and referral services	provide community based support	*Support in assessing and employment and training * Stable housing options *where appropriate support re-connection with family *Access to brokerage *Referral or provision of appropriate information on services and supports as required.
	Mentoring	Community connection and relationships building	Opportunities to interact with adults in community setting to mitigate against social isolation
	Leaving Care Brokerage	Funds dedicated exclusively for financial assistance for young people whilst care and later having exited care to help maintain independence.	Brokerage fund provided for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodation • Education, training and employment • Access to health and community services • Life skills education and connection to community.
	Springboard	12 agencies deliver across state. Agencies also deliver Youth Connections (Commonwealth funded)	Education, employment and training initiative focused on assisting young people aged 16-21 (in or recently left, residential out-of-home care) who have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from education, training and employment. The focus is on helping a young person build and maintain the skills, opportunities and connections necessary for a positive employment future.
	Leaving Care Hotline	Free telephone hotline	Providing young people currently in or transitioning from out-of-home care with access to someone for advice or referral to local support services.
	Youth Central website	Web-based information and resources (external site)	Providing all young people in Victoria with access to information and referral
	Various state funded services	Aimed at connecting young people to family, education and training, work, and/or community	
Research	Beyond 18	Longitudinal Study on Leaving Care	Long term research project focused on the lives of young people in out-of care and their experience transitioning from Care in Victoria.

Queensland leaving care provisions

In Queensland 'Transition from Care' is defined in legislation as the *process of preparing a young person in out-of-home care to transition to adulthood as required by Schedule 1(k) of the Child Protection Act 1999*. Section 76 of the Act which pertains to 'Transition from Care' indicates:

1. *This section applies to a child or person who is or has been a child in the custody or under the guardianship of the chief executive.*
2. *As far as practicable, the chief executive must ensure the child or person is provided with help in the transition from being a child in care to independence.*
3. *Without limiting subsection (2), the help may include financial assistance provided under section 159.*

The nature of what constitutes 'help' is further specified in the charter of rights (Schedule 1) of the *Child Protection Act 1999* and includes the right for every child and young person who is subject to the custody or guardianship of the state:

to receive appropriate help with the transition from being a child in care to independence, including, for example, help about housing, access to income support and training and education.

The age to which assistance should or can be provided to is not specified in legislation and policy suggests support is not expected to exceed 12 months beyond leaving care at 18 years (Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry 2013a, p.306).

At the time of undertaking this study the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry was undertaking a substantial process of consultation and hearings commencing in 2012. The Commission released for comment an *Options for Reform* paper (October 2012) and *Discussion Paper* (February 2013) (2013b) with leaving care a subject of specific attention. The final report of the Commission *Taking Responsibility: A Roadmap for Queensland Child Protection* was presented to the Queensland Government in late June 2013. The following extract from the final report summarises the Commissions view regarding post-care support and in particular the age which such support should be provided to.

Queensland is the only state where legislation, policy and practice are unclear as to how long the state must continue to deliver support once young people leave the care system at 18 years of age. If the overall aim of reducing demand on the system, and ultimately reducing the number of children in out-of-home-care, is achieved, then Child Safety officers will have more time to dedicate to planning for young people's transition. The Commission's view is that post-care support for young people should be provided until at least the age of 21, including priority access to state government services in the areas of education, health, disability services, housing and employment (pp.xxi-xxii).

The Commission made the following recommendations regarding transition from care:

- Recommendation 9.1

The Child Protection Reform Leaders Group develop a coordinated program of post-care support for young people until at least the age of 21, including priority access to government services in the areas of education, health, disability services, housing and employment services, and work

with non-government organisations to ensure the program's delivery. (p.306)

- Recommendation 9.2

The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services fund non-government agencies (including with necessary brokerage funds) to provide each young person leaving care with a continuum of transition-from-care services, including transition planning and post-care case management and support. (p.308)

- Recommendation 9.3

The Child Protection Reform Leaders Group include in the coordinated program of post-care support, access and referrals to relevant Australian Government programs, negotiating for priority access to those programs.(p.311)

The current Queensland Government (of the Liberal National Party) made an election commitment in 2012 to extend the period young people are supported in transitioning from care to 21 years of age.

Transition planning occurs within the case planning process. Policy requires that case plans for young people in out of home care aged 15 or over must include a transition from care plan. Progress towards achieving transition goals is to be documented as part of the case plan review or at a minimum of every six months (Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry 2013, p.292).

In terms of resources to inform Child Safety Officer (CSO) practice, the Child Safety Services Practice Manual resources include the Practice Paper *Supporting children and young people in care through transitions* (Queensland Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services 2006). This paper offers background information on how various transitions associated with out of home care can impact on children and young people and proposes that workers support the child or young person and mobilise significant others for “as long as it takes” (p.2, emphasis in original). Key elements of best practice are noted in the section on practice principles and include considering the situation from point of view of the child, taking a planned approach and working collaboratively with the child or young person (pp.4-6). This resource also contains practice ‘tips’ for key transitions including placement transitions during care and leaving care (pp.7-10). In part, this section reads:

For children and young people to successfully negotiate leaving care (at any age) they need workers, carers and families who join together in:

- comprehensive planning and preparation for this transition right from the point of admission to care (this involves maintenance of existing family and social relationships and a focus on education and vocational pursuits from the moment a child enters care);
- recognising the importance of this transition and the need for ongoing support after care;
- developing their network of significant family and social relationships; and
- targeting energy and resources to the child or young person’s education and future employment prospects.

While workers are often aware of the need for young people to leave care with a range of practical life skills and a stock of financial and material

resources, their need for support with family, social and cultural relationships often goes unrecognised. (pp.9-10).

Additional information can be found in the Practice Manual in Chapter 5 (QDCCS&DS, 2013).

In the last four years some dedicated leaving care support services have been developed in Queensland. These are summarised in Table 3 below.

Life Without Barriers (LWB) commenced in 2009 with a budget of \$500,000 per annum. The program is jointly funded through the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services and the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI) to deliver transition from care services to young people referred from nine Child Safety Service Centres in the wider Logan area (Tilbury 2011). An advocacy approach underpins the linking young people to relevant supports. Within LWB the Transition Support service assists young people leaving care to:

- Form safe, stable, nurturing relationships within their community
- Develop their self-reliance
- Access relevant community services where appropriate
- Transition to other care environments if necessary (Source: <http://www.lwb.org.au/Services/Family%20Support/Pages/links-4-life-transition-support.aspx>).

A number of strategies have been funded to assist young people with disabilities transition from care the Transition and Post-care Support- Disability program, and the Disability Services to the Young Adults Exiting the Care of the State program.

In respect of preventing homelessness arising from leaving care After Care Services have been established as a component within the Youth Housing and Reintegration Service (YHARS). These services are envisaged as delivering state-wide after care services from four locations (Inala, Toowoomba, Townsville, Rockhampton). YHARS is funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH).

There are also a range of more generally targeted support services to young people funded through state and/ or Commonwealth sources aimed at connecting young people to family, education and training, work, and/or community.

Table 3: Queensland leaving care provisions

	Description	Client group/ Focus	Process Description
Legislation	<i>Child Protection Act 1999</i> (Qld) Sections 74 and 75	General statutory obligation to provide transition from care assistance. Administered by Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services	<i>Child Protection Act 1999</i> Section 75(see above text). Section 74 refers to the Charter of Rights (Schedule 1) that legislates for children in care to receive appropriate help with transition to independence.
Policy	Child Safety policy 'Transition from Care No. 349' (<i>Child Safety Services Standards</i>) and the Department's <i>Child Safety Manual</i> , Chapter 7, Section 7.20: 'Transition from Care Procedures'	Transition from care planning to begin one month before turning 15	Transition planning currently coordinated by the Department. The priority given to transition differs across Child Safety Service Centres according to resourcing. Post 18 planning is not counted in workload measures. With no legislative requirement to do a specific transition from care plan, practice is to manage transition within the young person's case plan. If planning done according to policy with six monthly reviews, the final case plan should be a Leaving Care Plan.
Services	After Care Services* are a component within the Youth Housing and Reintegration Service (YHARS) to deliver state-wide after care services from four locations. Currently funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) till June 2014	Individualized support to assist young people 12-20 who are leaving state care and may be at risk of homelessness	YHARS – Intensive, case management and in some cases housing support carried out in a catchment around where each of the YHARS providers are located. Aftercare Brokerage, 17-21 (run by YHARS provider) provides brokerage money for young people leaving care and youth detention. Catchment area across the state via third party referral.
	Life Without Barriers Funded by the Qld Dept of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services	For young people 15-17 years subject to child protection orders and requiring transition support and those who have removed themselves from approved placement prior to turning 18. May include those who turn 18 where the Dept has opened a	Client centred approach and case management framework. Focus on employment and training with recognition that other issues such as housing, financial, health may need to be addressed before employment and educational outcomes are achievable (Tilbury 2011).

		Support Service Case to facilitate 12 month support to address unresolved transition from care issues.	
	<p><i>Transition and Post Care Support- Disability Program #and Young Adults Exiting the Care of the State##</i></p> <p>Funds Evolve Transition Officers in two community services (Community Living Association, Open Minds)</p> <p>Currently funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH)</p>	Provide transition from care support to young people with a disability aged 15-17 and those aged 18-21 (with regional discretion to work with young people to 25) to have safe and stable placements in the community. Provides accommodation and support with community living for young people with moderate or severe disabilities who are living in out-of home care or have recently transitioned from care and are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness.	<p>Two pathways of referral</p> <p>a) Child Safety to Evolve team;</p> <p>b) Child Safety to Service Access Team (Disability Services) and then to Evolve Transitions Officers (Evolve) link with relevant stakeholders to support the yp to plan transition from care with a focus on maintaining a safe and stable placement</p> <p>18+ post care services prioritised for young people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.</p>
Network	G-FORCE, a state wide Child Protection Partnership Forum comprised of government and non-government members and involvement of CREATE young consultants.	Focus on active participation and inclusion of children and young people in out of home care in their community and in decisions that affect lives, and how transitioning from out of home care to independence are supported	A mechanism to provide feedback about systemic changes that could lead to better outcomes for young people in out of home care.
Projects	<i>Go Your Own Way</i> kit Funding to Create Foundation (Qld)	Information to assist young people transitioning into independent living and adulthood	Developed in consultation with young people.
	Celebrating Transition from Care Month	Focus on the journey to independence undertaken by young people leaving care	Nov each year

#Dept of Communities *Transition from Post Care Support Program Fact Sheet* (Dated April 20 2013)

##Child Guardian Key Outcome Indicator – Qld Child Protection Report 2008-11 (p101)

*Child Guardian Key Outcome Indicator – Qld Child Protection Report 2008-11 (p101)

Experiences of young people from in care to post care

This section reports data from interviews with 27 care leavers in Victoria and Queensland.

In care experience

While the primary focus of our research questions was on post care experience, extant research and our own data demonstrate links between in care experience and homelessness. Table 4 below lists a number of features of the time spent in care and numbers of placements experienced by the 27 young people interviewed. Most had more than five placements, had spent one or more periods in residential care, and did not or were not aware of having a transition from care plan. Whilst every young person had a unique experience of being in care taken overall the samples from the two states are similar in respect of their in care profiles. Young adults from the two states differed in respect of the number indicating they had been referred to post care support with most in Victoria indicating this had happened and most in Queensland indicating it had not.

Table 4: In care summary

	Qld (n=13)	Victoria (n=14)
Age of first entry into care system	Ranged from 2 years – 13 years	Range 1month – 14 years
Average time in care	5 years	4-5 years
Average age when left final in care placement	14-16 years (living independently)	14 – 16 years N=1 (till 19years requested extension)
Had a single placement in care	2	0
Had 2-5 placements	2	6
Had more than 5-10 placements	11	8
Spent one or more periods in residential care	9	8
Indicated they had a transition from care plan or leaving care plan	4	4
Indicated they were referred to post care support service	3	11

In care experience and links to homelessness

A pathways framework was applied in analysing young people experiences and in this section we report patterns identified in terms of how young people's transitions may be typified as 'smooth' or 'volatile' (Johnson et al., 2010). To recap, the housing experiences and outcomes of young people with a volatile transition were characterised by poor experiences of supported or transitional

accommodation, a lack of professional and peer support and difficulties in maintaining accommodation and their independence. In contrast, a 'smooth' transition was typified by features such as having fewer placements and a felt sense of security in care, being involved in planning and older when they left care, and experiencing early success with stable accommodation.

As reported in studies reviewed previously, there is a pattern in the pathways of the young people interviewed. Those who had multiple foster placements also experienced difficulties in securing stable housing. In contrast, those who had a stable placement and remained with the same carer for a number of years indicated more stability in post care housing. Most reported in-care housing instability. However, in view of findings of previous research and the selection bias in the sample (purposely recruited for a homelessness experience) this is to be expected. The majority of participants reported having numerous foster care/kinship care and residential placements whilst being in care, and housing instability and/or multiple episodes of homelessness post care. For example, one young woman reported she had stayed in 'over 100' places since leaving care:

I would literally say over 100... In 7 years I haven't lived anywhere longer than 6 months. That's basically how I figured it out. In 6 weeks I moved 4 times. That was ridiculous. (Q2, female 22 years)

One young woman spoke about how her life had "never been stable". Her story is offered below as an illustrative case study of how the placement trajectory can influence post care housing instability.

Case Study 1: 'Trudy' and ongoing instability

Trudy talked of having had a chaotic life when she lived with her parents. She is one of 15 siblings and came into the care system on 3 separate occasions (the most recent from 16-18 years). During her time in care from 16 to 18 years she had 12 different placements (foster, kinship and residential). When she came into care her schooling was disrupted and she was only able to complete up to Year 8 equivalent. Post care she undertook alternative education and completed Year 10 equivalent.

When she was in residential care, she was beaten up by fellow young people in the unit, which led to the placement breakdown and contributed to her self-harming behaviours. She is currently diagnosed with Personality Disorder and has been admitted to mental health facilities on number of occasions. In between her residential placements, she was homeless and lived 'on the street'.

Trudy's residential care worker helped and assisted her in applying for transitional housing. Since leaving care she had moved ten times into a variety of accommodation types, including boarding house, transitional housing, and private rental, before securing a permanent public housing unit. During this period of instability she fell pregnant twice and now has 2 children, aged 2 and 1. She talked of her housing instability being caused by unsafe housing, being physically assaulted by other housemates, there being a convicted sex offender in the same building, and her own poor mental health.

Trudy is now in a de-facto relationship and her partner has 4 children, meaning there are now 6 children in the one household. There is current child protection involvement with regards to her partner and concerns around their current housing not being suitable or adequate for a large family. She is concerned that she will be unable to find suitable housing.

So my whole life I've never been stable. So I'm actually quite nervous if I do stay in this house coming up to that 4 year mark. Well is there going to be a 4 year mark anywhere? Am I ever going to be pass that mark or am I going to keep moving every 4 years? (V2, female 22 years, Melbourne)

Conversely some young people interviewed had a generally 'smooth' transition, typified by placements that were more supportive and stable, with connections developed during care that contributed to post care stability. The case study below details the experience of a young man for whom a combination of out-of-home care, reconnection with extended family (who became part of his family of destination), and leaving care support can each contribute to a smooth transition to adulthood.

Case Study 2: 'Carl' finds a more stable life in care

Carl's experience was of family homelessness prior to coming into care:

It was frustrating. All I know is that we just sort of had to follow mum and dad, like wherever dad got work, it was seasonal work.... we first moved to St. George ... We moved to another little town and I think we ended up moving to Adelaide and then back down to Melbourne and then over to Adelaide. Just everywhere.... I think it was where my father could get work and I think they had a lot of problems with drugs and alcohol....I remember once me and my mother were running away from my father and we slept in parks and on stations and that was only for a short amount of time though.

Carl came into care in Queensland when he was 8 years old. He lived with foster carers for three and a half years and then was moved to his paternal grandmothers in Victoria:

To start off with it was a completely new experience. I had no idea what was going on. As the year progressed, it was ... one of my crucial development periods and I'm so glad that we actually had a family to call our own. They loved us and cared for us as their own. That's why I still keep in touch with them. It's good to know that there are systems like this where kids that are in danger - whatever situation or experience - can go ... Well first thing we actually got in touch with family services officers in

Queensland, our social worker, they got in contact with Nan, and the usual you know, phone calls, and visits ... And eventually it was just put on the table, if we wanted to move back down to Melbourne, it would be better off, back with blood relatives and people that we know, more importantly being family. So ultimately it was a good decision that we made and they made for us as well. (Q19, male 20 years, Brisbane)

Carl received a leaving care package from the Victorian DHS at the age of 16 years, as he was moving out to live independently with his partner in private rental accommodation. He was able to complete high school and a certificate in hospitality and at the time of writing is employed.

This ‘mirroring’ of living stability and instability, pre and post transition, is consistent with the findings of other studies. For example those children and young people who experience multiple foster care placements whilst in the care system, also find it harder to form positive relationships with their carers, to transition to adulthood (e.g. Cashmore & Paxman, 1996), and gain a sense of connectedness with community.

This data from this study supports the view that future stability be understood relationally rather than simply as a function of the frequency of shifting placement. ‘Relational’ in this sense is not confined to relationships with other people but extended to services and social institutional connections e.g. to education, which in turn platform an enhanced sense of identity and future orientation. It is hard to imagine how accessing and enhancing this relational understanding of future stability is possible in respect of a particular young person, whose journey is unique in many respects, without eliciting in an ongoing way their understanding and evaluations of what has, is and should be happening in their lives.

A number of young people spoke of proactive connection with family of origin members who they could develop or maintain connection with, and who provided support for themselves and their partners as they built towards families of destination. This connection was generally not about returning to family of origin in a reunification sense but rather about relational and functional links which made sense within the context of the young person’s current needs and direction. Support with child care, education, and accommodation from usually a particular member of their family of origin were experienced as very helpful, even critical, for a number of young people we interviewed.

Most young people interviewed mentioned the importance to them of having a stable, consistent and trusted caseworker whilst they were in care who they could talk to about in care placement issues. They also talked of needing greater stability in their placements, and the importance of supportive connections and relationships. It was apparent that these relationships often brought longer term benefit during their transition from care. The notion that bridging relationships, that is those that bridge across in care and post care are strongly protective, will be further discussed later in this report. Many spoke of the critical role a ‘resi worker’ played in assisting them gain stability whilst in care, developing skills and resolving issues that assisted them when they did move on. Others spoke of wishing they had had such support and advice.

It is apparent that the orientation of residential and Departmental workers to the longer term journey of the young person was critical if residential care was to be enabling. One young person expressed this in terms of the workers skill set and understanding of the young person, and the particular trauma they had experienced. Overall their view is that “A good resi worker could make a big difference”.

There are good grounds for working on the basis that a smoother in care experience which attends to the building of young people’s pool of positive social connections, broadly conceived, is likely to have a preventive effect in respect of homelessness.

Whilst there were some positive aspects to some accounts overall the young people interviewed who disclosed being placed into residential facilities described them in negative terms (‘worst place’). Many reported that they were exposed to high risk behaviours of other young people, which in turn compromised their safety and wellbeing. One young woman described how another young person sharing the same room tried to smother her baby.

One of the young women interviewed stated that she had been in 18 different residential units as well as 16 different foster placements and 5 kinship carer placements from the age of 12 year to 16 years. Factors cited as resulting in placement breakdown from this young woman included carers health issues, and not being accepted by the foster carer. As a consequence, she would regularly abscond from her placements and be on the streets in Melbourne.

They ended up putting me back in DHS care and ... I went from Resi unit to Resi unit. I had 18 different Resi units. Like sometimes, I went back to the same Resi unit two or three times, but it was 18 different moves from Resi unit. I went to 16 different foster care placements and five kinship placements (5 of my dad’s brothers, and 2 of his sisters). Yeah, and then I was there for a while and then one of them died of a heart attack, another one died of a brain tumour. And so I kept getting moved, as soon as they got sick I was no longer allowed to live there and I had to move on. Even when I was pregnant with my daughter. I’d done 5 different moves then between different Resi units. But in between that, especially with a lot of the foster homes they always broke down. So I’d be sick of being treated like an outsider, so I’d kind of run away again. Get picked up by the police and my placement would have changed. (V9, female, 22 yrs, Melbourne region)

There was mixed response on the level of support provided by residential care workers in supporting young people in their placement. Some participants who had multiple placements were able to move into and maintain stable housing with the assistance and support of a residential youth worker.

I moved ... I think it was 23 times and that includes going back and forward from secure welfare ... I know that I had a really good [service] worker who was my Resi care worker and she did a lot of organisation so I could get this place, because she wanted me somewhere good. And somewhere I wasn’t time limited I guess, because that’s really unstable for me. I’ve been in this transitional housing for nearly 5 years. (V7, female, 22yrs, Melbourne region)

In other instances participants felt that their residential workers did not care about them and was just 'babysitting', not helping them build life skills, attend school or address substance misuse or mental health issues.

For several young people interviewed homelessness was a direct outcome of experiencing abuse in care. A number of participants disclosed being abused by their foster carers (sexual and physical abuse), which contributed towards their placement breakdown and the young person running away and becoming homeless. For many young people they did not disclose the abuse to their caseworker or press criminal charges. The following information provided by young woman in Toowoomba illustrates this:

It was ok to start with, but then she [the foster carer] got married ... when I was 10 years old and then he [the new husband] started doing stuff to me and the other little girls that were in care.

Researcher: Did the Department become involved?

No. The Department just said when I was 16, I could self place myself.

Researcher: Where did you go when you were 16?

I went to my friend's place, she was also my respite provider at the time. She is a carer, but she was my respite carer as well as a friend. (Q20, female 19 years, Toowoomba region)

The additional trauma of secondary abuse by a foster carer contributed towards the downward spiral for another young person: becoming involved in illicit drug taking, juvenile prostitution, developing significant mental health issues with self harming behaviours, and becoming homeless.

At 16 I moved into a foster uncle's home and that's where everything went upheaval. He started sexually assaulting me and then he tried to convince me to commit suicide, so I left there, because his wife was starting to find out and stuff, so I left there and went to a hostel. And that was very rough. I moved in with my biological mother, but she's a drug addict [and] an alcoholic. And that got me involved with a drug dealer, he and I moved away from them, but that was onto the streets and more halfway houses. He was my pimp. Oh it was rough. He got me addicted to drugs [heroin] and I was doing all sorts of horrible things. I was doing that up until I moved in with my foster carers. I was with him for a year. (V6, female 20yrs, Melbourne region)

Numerous research studies and child protection inquiries have identified that some children and young people experience abuse whilst in the care of the Department (e.g. foster carers, residential workers) (for example see Cummins, Scott & Scales, 2012; Uliando & Mellor, 2012). For some of the young people in our study this additional 'system abuse' was a significant contributing factor towards:

- Placement breakdowns;
- Young person absconding, running away;
- Young person unable to discuss or press criminal charges against the perpetrators;
- Young person developing mistrust of agencies and staff (Department/Police);

- Young person being reluctant to seek assistance and support (which exacerbated their vulnerability);
- Young person becoming involved in criminal offending (e.g. drugs and alcohol substance misuse, shoplifting, juvenile prostitution).

Experiences of homelessness: in care and since leaving care

Most participants had a homelessness experience while in care. Being ‘kicked out’ of home or foster care placements and ‘running away’ from residential care and other placements were common experiences. In addition, and important in respect of homelessness early intervention, many participants also expressed feelings of ‘felt homelessness’ such as those of one young woman who told us “*I never really had a home*” (Q12, female 19yrs, Toowoomba region). Rather than existing as separate categories it was apparent these young people often experienced various forms of homelessness over time.

A high proportion (24 out of 27) of the young adults interviewed had experienced at some time ‘living on the street’ which included sleeping in parks, benches, bus shelters, shopping centre car parks, in a church and under a jetty. A majority of the females interviewed disclosed that to survive ‘on the street’ they either had to perform sexual favours or prostitution, or be involved in ‘violent relationships’. Some of the female participants were assaulted and witnessed assaults of other homeless people. Using drugs and alcohol was cited as a coping mechanism.

Many of the participants had ‘coach surfed’ since leaving care, this involved staying with friends, partners, former foster carers or even going back to their biological parents. There was a myriad of reasons why young people experienced instability in their accommodation; abusive partners, inability to pay rent or bond, tensions with others in shared accommodation and housing, feeling lonely, mental health/ mental illness issues and being evicted or black listed. The interaction of individual, relational and institutional complexity typifies the narratives of young people who experience homelessness in or post care. This young woman’s story shows how multiple factors interacted in her experience of ongoing housing instability:

I was asked to leave one place for not being sociable enough, for spending too much time in my bedroom. And other places I’ve been kicked out for being too sociable, too in your face, too all over your house. They were like ‘You need to shut up and leave us alone’. Each place is just different because it depends on the people. I was 19, I moved into a caravan park with a partner I had at the time, I guess I thought he was paying rent, he thought I was paying the rent, and it got to a point that we were like six weeks in debt, we had to pay it or leave, and because we didn’t pay it, we got black listed. (Q11, female 22 years, Brisbane region)

Below a young woman from Toowoomba region describes her experience of how being provided accommodation but how insufficient engagement with others led to homelessness:

I was 17 when I was on the street. Well just before that happened, Child Safety put me in [a service] when I was living in a really big house on my own and that only lasted for a couple of weeks until I totally freaked out. I left and went to Brisbane and stayed on the streets because I couldn’t cope.... I was there for about 4 months, in and out of shelters, on and off the streets. (Q12, female 19 years, Toowoomba region)

Another young woman experienced multiple housing breakdowns since leaving care, and highlighted the various challenges she had faced in securing stable housing in Qld:

You can go on Housing Commission list from the age of 16. I think for every child in care, Child Safety should help them do that. Put them on the list. But you can't just put them on the list and then say 'Well good luck with that', you have to let them know that they need to keep it updated ... One of my biggest problems, why I've turned down a lot of houses is for the fact that I don't have a fridge; I don't have a washing machine. I did not get a leaving care package. Both my sisters got that, but I never got that. I never got a single thing from them. But that kind of stuff will really help. Because Housing Commission now has a new section like when you apply, one of the options is are you transitioning from care and it puts you on a bit of a higher up list. But there's no point having a house if you can't put anything in it and you don't have a bed to sleep on and you don't have a fridge. So they need help with it. Because a lot of other children have their parents, who help them, or parents who have a spare fridge or a spare bed. Yeah my foster parents weren't that helping. I think getting a job's a big one, being employed. Because you need something to pay the rent, Centrelink just doesn't pay it. (Q11, female 22 years, Brisbane region)

Difficulty gaining access to financial support was a common issue experienced by many young care leavers.

I had applied to Uni and I got accepted. I really wanted to go straight to uni, but I was in such a bad financial position... I was still getting paid 17 year old wages, which were terrible so I couldn't afford to go to Uni... I went to Centerlink and said this is what I want to do, can I get some sort of allowance so I can afford to go to uni. Even though I told them I was in foster care, they tried to give me a straight youth allowance, like a normal youth allowance [and] they still wanted to calculate it on my father's income, and my father earns like way too much for me to be able to do that... And I just couldn't afford to do it [go to uni] and I was hoping that after a year of saving or different job opportunities or whatever, that my financial capabilities would definitely, hopefully expand. So yeah I lived at that share house and just continued working and was finally able to convince Centrelink to give me a special living out of home allowance, so that was the only reason I was able to go to uni. (Q3, female 20 years, Brisbane region)

Some young people when homeless were able to access support from crisis and short term youth accommodation providers eg youth shelters, however their experience was varied:

[Youth service], I went to them a couple of times; they got me into a couple of different places. And yeah, we got phone numbers and stuff for homeless shelters and they'd ask us questions before they'd take us in. In a homeless shelter, they lock up your stuff, they take your phones. It's terrible. You share, there's one bedroom and there's like 5 beds in that one room and you have to share that room. Yeah, I got asked quite a lot of questions. I got asked why everything was happening. (Q12, female 19 years, Toowoomba region)

Although focus group participants were not selected because they had a homelessness experience the majority of participants in every group recounted times when they either had no stable accommodation or were living with friends or relatives on a temporary basis, some sleeping on

couches, some with rooms of their own. One slept on her cousin's boyfriend's couch for three months (Inala, Feb, 2013). The strain of homelessness was evident as one spoke of the anxiety generated by having just a three month transitional house (North Melbourne, Feb, 2013), while another told how 'got harder every night' (Inala, Feb, 2013). Another spoke of staying with friends rather than living in the residential where they had been placed which reminds us that many young people experience homelessness both before and during care (AIHW, 2012a).

As noted in the background section, research may be framed on the assumption that young people were becoming homeless *after* leaving care. However, several participants became homeless as a direct outcome of experiencing abuse in care. Such abuse was rarely reported yet has been shown to potentially contribute towards a downward spiral of risk-taking and self-harm. All had lived on the streets or couch surfed and many had experienced high risk situations. They spoke of how multiple factors interacted in the experience of housing instability with common threads being violent relationships, taking drugs to cope, financial hardship and frustration with systems ostensibly designed to offer support to those seeking housing. As will be seen below, access to transitional housing arranged with the support of a responsive worker, was a critical linchpin for many in securing a smooth transition from care.

Transition from care planning

Three considerations emerge as important to consider from young people's accounts. The first is whether transition planning takes place at all, particularly for those young people whose pathways are most volatile. As indicated previously in Table 4 only 8 of the 27 young people interviewed indicated they had a transition from care or leaving care plan. There is some level of retrospectivity in this data given the young people interviewed have left care and are reflecting on a practice environment one to five years ago. Service provider focus group feedback indicated planning sometimes may occur from the perspective of the Department but not meaningfully involve or be known to the young person.

Second is the focus and conceptualising of such planning, and whether it adequately appreciates the intersecting aspects of wellbeing which dynamically develop over a substantial period of time as a young person develops the capacities, resources and relationships to effectively build their adult life. This occurs for young people more generally not as an event or set of independent living tasks but as a scaffolded, multi-life domain focused, and supported exploration of their life journey over many years. This alerts us to the importance of articulating what a plan is meant to achieve, and clarifying that it is not simply undertaken as a procedural requirement. There is enormous potential for plans to involve a degree of ceremonial conformity to a planning process or policy without being of substantive value or reflecting the authenticity of intent that makes the process meaningful for young people.

Third, and closely related to the authenticity of planning processes, is the quality of the planning engagement with the young person. This necessitates a 'youth friendly' climate created over time, where the young person feels they are able to be meaningfully and genuinely involved. Such quality is 'built' over time.

There was a higher proportion of young people (n=16) who indicated that they did NOT receive any 'Transition from Care planning' by the relevant Department (DHS or DOCS).

National Standards and State policies around Transition from Care planning have a key role to play in preventing homelessness. However, many of the young people indicated that they did not have a 'Transition from Care' (TFC) Plan. This was true of young people interviewed in both Queensland and Victoria. Additionally they did not feel their views were taken into consideration during discussions about leaving care. The following account is from a young woman in Queensland, and raises the critical issue of the young person's role in developing a framework for a plan, articulating their aspirations and having them heard and incorporated in the plan and thus having understanding and ownership of the process and outcome.

I only had two discussions about transition from care ever. One was when I was about 15 and my CSO [Child Safety Officer] at the time said, 'You know you should think about TFC' [transition from care] and that was about the extent of the conversation – 'What do you think you want to do?', 'I don't know'. 'Ok, well you've got some time to think about it'. And then when I was 17 my CSO, we sat down and she said 'What are you thinking about doing?' And I said I was thinking about doing a dual degree, and then she said, 'OK, now let's look at some other options' and she pulled out like a TAFE guide and she said 'Oh maybe you could think about working part time or maybe going to TAFE one day'. Like it was this far off, if I was lucky, like University was totally discounted as an option, she didn't even recognize it as a possibility. She was like 'OK, right, wants to go here, not an option. Right now let's look at some more realistic possibilities shall we', and that just made me really angry. And so I just pretended to go through that with her and we came up with a plan which was her plan, not my plan. (Q3, female 20 years, Brisbane region)

Currently this young woman is enrolled in double degree at University and has worked two jobs since leaving care to support herself financially.

One of the participants described how she was homeless the day she left care and related her sense of being abandoned by the Departmental caseworker:

No I never even got a leaving care package... The day I left care I was homeless, the day of my 18th birthday. And they pretty much paid for me to get my 18 plus card and they gave me my birth certificate. And I said to them 'Well, homeless!'. And they said 'Well as of 5 o'clock that's not our problem'. And that was all done and gone and then 3 months after I left care they made me come in for a meeting to see how I was going and ... I didn't go. (Q11, female 22 years, Brisbane region)

It was apparent that to many young people a focus on accommodation/ housing was both important but by itself was insufficient. In some other accounts even where the Department provided or facilitated assistance it was seen by the young person as too limited in scope and extent. As stated by one young woman from Victoria:

I was in a leaving care program, but there wasn't really support, it was 'Oh, you need to live in a boarding house, it's the only place you'll find'. And then they handed me a book of things, like I had to do one set of cooking, one set of washing the clothes and the dishes and

apparently they deemed me fit enough to be independent. I did not have a leaving care plan.
(V2, female 22 years, Melbourne region)

It may be that practice has evolved rapidly over the last few years since our participants have left care. In Queensland, the *Snapshot 2012* report states that a transition from care plan was recorded for 63.9% of young people 15 years and over on care orders, with 57.2% of young people involved in the development of these (Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, 2012, p.119). However, the 2013 CREATE Report Card (McDowall 2013) asked Australian young people aged 15-17 questions about preparing to become independent and found that only 33.1% (of their sample of 281) reported knowing that a leaving care plan had been developed for them.

Whilst the numbers involved in this small scoping study are not sufficient to generalise to the broader care leaving population it would seem that those young people who have a higher chance of becoming homeless are less likely to have explicit leaving care planning done *with* them, and that such planning needs to better appreciate and respond to the complex of factors that influence prospects for living situations consistent with building a platform for future wellbeing. Clearly further research is warranted into context responsive and person-centered implementation of policies related to transition from care planning.

Bridging support across the point of leaving care

As indicated previously young people can experience leaving care as an abrupt cessation of support.

You are a part of a system full of support when you are in care and then you have nothing.
(Focus group with young people in Brisbane).

There were a number of cases where young people described a positive experience in developing their TFC plans when the Department referred them to an aftercare support service prior to leaving care. Continuity can be enhanced when the same agency can work with a young person prior to and after leaving care, as illustrated by the experience of this young woman who had been linked to the aftercare service from the age of 16:

My first [service name] worker was T. and yeah she helped me heaps. She fought for me to get my Centrelink money. She fought for me to stay in my placement. She made sure I got into a lead tenant property and that I was safe. Yeah, made sure I was attending school too. She always used to keep in contact with me and used to always hear me out. So she was more of a friend than a worker ... a nice caring person. (V1, female 20 years, Melbourne region)

In numerous other cases young people talked of how helpful it was to have a specific relationships or sources of support able to be sustained when they left care. This desire for continuity around those specific relationships that worked for them manifested in numerous ways including:

- Commencement of leaving care support well prior to leaving care that allowed for continuity of engagement with a particular service or worker;

- Continued relationship with, and sometimes staying with, a particular care provider who they 'clicked with' and who was experienced as particularly supportive;
- Continued relationship with positive peer friendships developed in care;
- Re-engagement with family of origin members within the context of developing greater agency.

Such bridging can be seen as providing a smoothing or stabilising effect across the in care- leaving care disjuncture.

Post care experience and support

Young people were asked if they had been referred to a post care support service. There were 14 young people who indicated that this had happened and of these 10 were located in Victoria. This is consistent with the more recent development of, and less widespread availability of, leaving care support services in Queensland.

Accessing stable accommodation and housing

There were some differences in responses between young people from the two states around their experience of housing service systems. Young people from Victoria more frequently referred to:

- Accessing transitional housing and lead tenancy housing;
- Prioritised listing on the public housing waiting list; and
- Accessing an aftercare support service, delivered by various funded NGOs, which assisted with housing matters.

By comparison young care leavers in Queensland generally did not report the same level of access to these types of services or support systems. That said, there are some after care services funded in Queensland and one of the young woman interviewed had been supported by one of these and found them extremely useful. Below we hear how a funded aftercare service helped her find suitable accommodation and escape a violent relationship:

I left care this year. I was on a six month voluntary order. It's where they still check up on you, they call you up every now and then. They help you with organisations and stuff like that ... I was referred to [agency name] Aftercare when I exited the care system. They helped me with getting a house, because I was down living in Ipswich. When I exited foster care I ended up moving in with friends and a guy I was dating at the time. He made it difficult to live there, so I had to move.... I was in a violent relationship ... which was my first [relationship]. I was living with him for nearly a year. I broke up with him this year just after February. I was with him while I was in foster care. And he jeopardized most of my accommodations because he'd have fights with the residential carers ... The Department made that referral, but [the agency] are the only ones who have helped me so much. They've helped me find a stable place where I'm actually enjoying myself. Have my own privacy; don't have to deal with drama... He (agency worker) would call me up, see how I was. If I needed anything like I

had to go, I went to the dentist and they said my bill would be \$900. [The agency] paid for that, they got my teeth fixed. They got me new glasses because I needed new glasses. They got me \$1,000 on gift cards for [furniture]... My room is fully furnished. They just helped me out of Ipswich, they helped me be able to get the strength to dump ... [the abusive boyfriend]. (Q13, female, 19 years, Toowoomba region)

Some other young adults indicated they sought assistance and support from former foster parents or members of their family of origin (usually a biological parent). The outcomes of this re-engagement were variable with little evidence of external support being provided for young people to negotiate the potential complexities of this.

The following excerpt from the interview with a young Brisbane woman who had lived in 11 places since leaving care highlights the role past carers and family of origin can play post care for a young person with few options, and in this case the limitations of these in addressing long term instability for young people with a volatile profile :

I'm moving into the garage of one of my old foster carers just until like after Christmas New Year's.

Interviewer: As a young person who's left care, what do you think about homelessness?

I think it happens really regularly and a lot quicker than people realise.

Interviewer: So when you were about to leave care where did you go to first?

I went to my Godparents. I was there for like a month, two months. I moved in with my mum's mum. She's not a very good person. I tried to have a relationship with them and I needed somewhere. My Godparents live out in the bush, so they [my grandparents] live closer to the city, so they're like, 'Oh you can move in here' but I only stayed for one month. (Q2, female 21 years, Brisbane region)

In terms of what young people reported would have been helpful many participants identified that they would benefit from being linked with a youth worker and post care support service, which could assist them with completing their studies, learning to drive, getting a job, accessing counselling and developing life skills. Timely information, facilitated access to appropriate housing and accommodation, and being linked in to housing services were themes for good or improved practice. Specific suggestions were also made around being placed earlier on the public housing waiting list (say at age of 15 years), being provided with information on getting a bond loan, rent assistance, tenancy laws and rights/responsibilities, maintaining a rental property etc from a housing service, and having access to affordable and safe housing which was close to public transport, services, and in safe neighbourhoods.

Engagement in education, training and work

This research study probed for but did not systematically ask all young people specific questions about education, training and employment. Table 5 below indicates the young people's level of

schooling, their current situation in respect of study, work or looking for work, and numbers on Centrelink benefits as disclosed. For many schooling was disrupted as a consequence of their placement or the number of placement moves they experienced. This then negatively impacted on their access to work or further education/training opportunities.

I had 20 placements, so I kept moving around, so it became hard, especially for schooling. (Q201, male, 19 years, Logan, Qld)

I haven't worked nearly in 3 years. Just can't get a job no matter how much I apply. People don't want to hire me. I mean my last completed grade was year 7. So I didn't finish high school. I did up to year 10, but because I did year 10 through [an alternative education facility] ... it's not the high school standard of Queensland so technically I've only done up to year 7. I can read and write and all that pretty well. (Q11, female 22 years, Brisbane region)

Table 5: Education, training, employment and income support status

	Qld (n=13)	Victoria (n=14)
Completed Education:	Year 12 = 5	Year 12 = 6
School year level	Year 11 = 3	Year 11=1
	Year 10 = 2	Year 10 = 2
	Year 7 = 1	Year 9 = 2
	Not disclosed = 2	Year 5 =1
		Not disclosed = 2
Currently enrolled in further studies (self disclosed):		
Year 12 High School Certificate	N=0	N=2
TAFE	N=3	N=6
Apprenticeship	-	N=1
University	N=3	N=1
Looking for work	N=2	-
Not engaged in any activity	N=3	-
Employed	N=4	N=4
Financial income status (receiving government benefits)	Centrelink Benefits= 10	Centrelink Benefits= 10

Those young people who were linked in with leaving care support services were able to describe the various types of support they had received from their worker and how this assisted them commence or maintain studies, training or employment:

They [the service] helped me with my education for my Certificate 3 in Aged Care and then they helped me get into Geelong where I'm doing my Certificate 4 Disability ... [Now they've] found someone who's quite well off, who's happy to help some people to get to where they need to in life. And this gentlemen is paying my fees for my Certificate 4, which means he's

paying for all my books, all my equipment that I'm using. (V6, female, 20 years, Melbourne region)

One young woman left care having only completed up to year 9. Now, at 22 years old, she is completing her Year 12 through Distance Education and getting support from a Youth Connections service that runs study groups in the local library once a week. This means she can access tutors that would be too expensive for her to afford (V7, female, 22 years, Melbourne region). Another young person in Queensland described the combination of accommodation and educational support she received from an after care service as critical to her progress.

It is interesting that two of the young people (one from Victoria and one from Queensland) had been financially supported to undertake secondary education through support provided without personal engagement, one by a birth father, another by a philanthropist. In both cases this was reported as the critical factor in their educational progression, and as paving the way for tertiary level studies (one currently enrolled).

At focus groups with young people there was substantial emphasis on the need for support in respect of employment, with a range of specific needs indicated:

Help with learning how to apply for work.

Foster carers didn't teach us about job skills.

Employers take advantage of young people – not paying them properly or on time.

Knowing your rights at work.

Relationships

It is apparent from the data that there are a wide range of relationships that can be important to young people and from which they derive practical and emotional support. This is consistent with Johnson et al. (2010) who identified that while housing was a critical element in responding to care leavers' needs, the presence of reliable, sustainable social relationships was equally important. It was also very apparent that many of the young people felt they had to deal with relationships that were highly destabilising and did not allow them to move forward in their lives.

The accounts of relationships of these young people indicate they are involved in a process of working out who they will take forward in their lives as significant people. As with most of us this involves a mix of people from families of origin, and other significant people met as they 'grow up', including new relationships of varying types and levels of intimacy. Our data suggests a substantial link between processes and outcomes of relationship formation and the prevention of homelessness. That is, developing a stable living situation is inextricably tied in with the availability of relational connections and supports, which in turn provide enhanced access to other sources of resilience.

The positive effect of support from partners (boyfriends/girlfriends) was evident in the accounts of numbers of young people in our study contributing to housing stability and felt sense of security.

What had happened is ... my place is getting too small and I have a job so I don't feel like I really needed the public house anymore because my neighbours were not the nicest of people, and yeah my boyfriend wanted to move in with me. And he goes 'Let's get a house together', and so we were looking for rental properties and we found a nice town house. (V1, female, 20 years, Melbourne region)

Those young people who were parents with children with them were motivated to look for stability in housing and schools.

I've just moved in with my partner and she owns her own house... It's close to main roads, it's got schools close by, shops close by...I've always been very resourceful, but there was the time I left my husband I went to a friend's house for a couple of days and went between a few friends houses before I could get into a refuge. I've also got a 5 year old daughter, so she's always been with me, so she's always been a motivator to try and be somewhat stable. Obviously I'm not, but to try and be somewhat stable and not have her sleep on couches. (V12, female, Melbourne region)

[I'm in a] housing commission house at the moment. Town house, two bedroom. Living with my Fiancée, I think I've been here about 5 months now. I feel fine, but my fiancée's got a bit of anxiety and she doesn't feel exactly safe, but I don't like hanging around and talking to people. (Q18, male, 21 years, Brisbane region)

Three young people indicated they had returned to their biological (birth family) (2 in Victoria and 1 in Queensland). Those in Victoria described a positive experience and 'felt' support from their biological parents.

For me that's a big thing with my parents' rental property, because I got behind in rent and I still wasn't evicted because my parents kind of gave me that little bit of leeway knowing all the difficult situations I'm going through and stuff. (V6, female, 20 years, Melbourne region)

Some of the young people sought help and assistance from their former foster families or respite carers. They identified them 'as family' and felt safe and comfortable to ask for assistance and support.

I'm living with foster parents that I knew on and off as a younger person, that I call mum and dad. I've stayed constant with them now 3 years. Very good, it's very supportive, because I also have a mental health disorder and they help maintain it. (V9, female, 22 years, Melbourne region)

Conversely, some relationships contribute to instability. That is, instability can be sustained or exacerbated by who they are in close proximity to and the way limitations in their accommodation and housing provision render it difficult or impossible for them to insulate themselves from others' vulnerabilities and behaviours. Environments of group or shared accommodation, peer and partner networks where other people have mental health issues, problematic alcohol and other drug use, conflict with authorities, and unstable or inadequate housing often impact on them in highly

negative ways. When the young people talked of having 'space', a place of their own, and a future, they were often referring to an environment where they could gain control and agency and not be undermined in their progress towards this by others who also had substantial and complex issues. This was particularly true of the young people who had volatile child protection journeys and transitions. Without connections to informal social supports and supportive family and community based relationships they were dependent on service systems.

For example, one young woman reported her share house arrangement became unsafe due to drugs and criminal activity which led to her calling her biological mother was 'last option'. She had nowhere else to go and was highly anxious to try to find her own place (Q12, female, 19 years, Toowoomba region). There were also mixed responses on the role partners had for young people and their housing stability. Most notably, recall the experience of Q13 reported earlier whose accommodation was 'jeopardised' by her violent partner. She was one of the eight (out of 22) young women who disclosed they had experienced domestic violence, which then led to post care housing instability and homelessness. Another account below gives a sense of the ongoing difficulties that these care leavers can experience as relationship difficulties are compounded by financial constraints:

I've experienced domestic violence ... with my son's father. I had to try and kick him out and he keeps coming back and breaking in. And I contact him, and contact them [Vic Public Housing], and they've said to me, 'Well you've still got another 10-year wait ahead of you', because I'm in some sort of accommodation now. I asked them what's it going to take. They said 'If he pretty much nearly kills and you end up in hospital or he breaks in and hurts the kids, then and only then, we'll be able to come in move you out and put you in crises accommodation and ... from there, we'll be able to get you in a house within two weeks'. (V6, female, 20 years, Melbourne region)

The data presented above illustrates how significant relationships with family, including foster family, and intimate partners can be in stabilising or destabilising young people as they strive to make a home for themselves. There are good grounds for suggesting that forming and negotiating relationships is a life domain that young people leaving care need clear access to ongoing support around. Relationships with workers will be discussed later in this report.

We need to learn more about relationships, learning about positive relationships. (Victorian focus group with young people)

Longitudinal interview data

The data from the longitudinal sample provided an opportunity to further explore young people's experience of accommodation and housing instability, the factors which help or hinder in building stability, and the character of positive post care practice from the perspective of young care leavers.

Table 6 on the following page details the shifts in accommodation situation and felt stability for the 17 young people who were interviewed twice over a four month period. Their trajectory through

care has been classified as volatile or smooth and their post care situation further nuanced by applying Stein's categories to their situation at the time of their second interview. The second interview enabled a judgement to be made about their accommodation situation and felt stability, and whether these were improving or otherwise, in light of the two sets of interviews. Further the factors that seem to be most significant in their level of stability could be discerned and included the role of post care support, the role of supportive relationships, connections to education and/ or work, and level of individual capacity and agency. It is acknowledged that these categories are ascribed at a given point on time and people can move between them. The distinction made by Johnson et al. (2010) between smooth (S) and volatile (V) placement experiences was applied as was Stein's (2012) distinction between post care categories of 'moving on', 'survivors' and 'strugglers'. Each young person's living situation was judged according to whether their accommodation had improved in terms of type, and also the young person's affective orientation to this in what we term 'felt stability'.

Table 6: Characteristics of longitudinal participants

Participant	Placement experience	Transition from care planning by Dept	Referred to post care	Type of housing at first interview	Number of moves since	Type of housing at 2 nd interview	Improved accommodation status	Improved felt stability	Stein group
MOVING ON (Stein group 1)									
V9	V	No	No	With former foster carers	0	With former foster carers	Same	Yes	Former foster carer and MH worker critical.
V7	S	Yes	Yes	Transitional Housing	0	Transitional Housing	Same	Yes	MH case worker and Youth Connections support critical to stability.
V7	S	Yes	Yes	Transitional Housing	0	Transitional Housing	Same	Yes	MH case worker and Youth Connections support critical to stability.
V6	V	Yes	Yes	Private rental supported by birth family	0	Private rental supported by birth family	Same	Yes	Support by birth family and flexible rental arrangement key, stable partner, working.
V1	S	No	Yes	Public Housing (previously in Transitional Unit)	1	Moved into private rental with boyfriend (4yr r'ship) – gave up public housing	Changed	Yes	Leaving care support critical. Stability with work, defacto. Felt security high, adult independence.
Q3	V	Yes	No	Private rental (de-facto relationship)	0	Private rental (building own house)	Yes	Yes	Individual resilience evident. Limited formal support. Birth father financed education. Studying at university. Adult independence.
Q13	S	No	Yes	Youth Hostel (renting a room- quite stable)	1	Living temporarily with boyfriends parents, looking for place of own	No	Yes	Good support from YHARS support service, supportive partner, working, adult independence.
Q20	V	No	N	Living with partner's aunts house (until private rental becomes available)	1	Private rental (3bdroom unit) owned by partners aunt	Yes	Yes	Stable partner, pregnant with 2 nd child, adult independence.
Q19	S	Yes (in Vic)	Yes (Vic)	Private rental unit	0	Private rental unit	Same	Same	Good aftercare support from Victoria, working, adult independent.

Participant	Placement experience	Transition from care planning by Dept	Referred to post care	Type of housing at first interview	Number of moves since	Type of housing at 2 nd interview	Improved accommodation status	Improved felt stability	Stein group
SURVIVORS (Stein group 2)									
V3	V	No	Yes	Share house/with friend	1	Transitional Housing	Yes	Yes	Leaving care worker critical to improvement.
V4	V	No	No	Private rental unit	1	Unexpected move private rental unit	Same	No	Now linked in with leaving care support, birth family support, recent instability but due to support positive direction.
Q15	V	No	No	Youth Social Housing Unit	0	Youth Social Housing Unit	Same	Yes	Better overall stability due to on-site youth worker support. Studying at TAFE.
Q17	V	Yes	Yes	Private rental unit	0	Private rental unit	Same	Same	Disability support, stable defacto relationship, parent of 2, studying, continued CP involvement.
STRUGGLERS (Stein group 3)									
V2	V	Yes	Yes	Public Housing	0	Public Housing	Same	No	Complex life; MH; CP involvement with partners children.
V5	V	No	No	Lives with birth mother	0	Lives with birth mother	Same	No	No leaving care support. Complex ongoing needs. MH, criminal history, current DV charges, health issues, low education.
Q2	V	No	No	Moving from share house to former foster carers	2	Share house with friend	No	No	Continuing instability. Lack of affordable housing. Unstable share housing. Stable partner relationship. Working.
Q11	V	No	No	Large share house (11 bedroom)	2	Share house in unit complex with partner	Yes	Same	Complex life. No formal support. Limited education. Low attachment. ongoing anxiety about moving.
Q12	V	Yes	No	Renting a room	3	Moved back with birth mum temporary	No	No	Complex life, MH, limited life skills, service supports not sustained.

The nine young people categorised in the ‘moving on’ group can be seen in the first section of Table 6. Guided by Stein (2012) these young people were placed in this category because their living situations tended to be stable and they reported a sense of control over their lives. Of note all people with a placement experience assessed as stable (S) are in this group, although it also includes four people assessed as having a volatile experience. It also includes five of the eight people who reported Departmental transition from care planning. While three people seen as ‘moving on’ had moved accommodations between the first and second interviews they did not move to a worse place and reported either the same or improved sense of stability. Included in this group were the young woman whose birth parent helped with finances and is now studying at university (Q3), the young man who is in stable employment and living with his wife in private rental accommodation (Q19) and the young woman who continues to happily live with her former foster family (V9). Most, but not all (6 of the 9), had been linked into a Post Care support service. The three not linked to such a service were all classified as having a volatile placement history. All however had substantial ongoing support from some quarter, such as the financial support of their family of origin, a stable partner relationship, or support from another service such as a mental health service.

The ‘survivors’, in Stein’s typology (2012) are those who saw themselves as self-reliant and doing well despite adversity. We assessed four of our participants as being in this group. This group includes people who mainly perceived stability and accommodation status to have improved or stayed that same (only one reported less sense of stability but the destabilising change was in a positive direction). The woman now studying at TAFE with the help of an anonymous benefactor (Q15) has been placed in this group. She attributed her ability to make changes in her life partly to her access of a ‘Youth social housing unit’ which provided her with onsite youth support workers:

They helped me with my assignments, make sure they’re in on time and stuff, and talk to my teachers if I need it. They’re helping me look for work. They’re helping me pay my bills. (Q15, female, 19 years, Logan region)

‘Robin’ is another young woman who was able to begin working through a number of difficulties between the first and second interviews was also placed in this group: her story is presented below. It contains numerous case and systemic complexities, and illustrates the need for informed, persistent, person-centered and context responsive support, as well as further attention to facilitating timely access to sustainable housing for such young people.

Case study 3: Starting to become a survivor

‘Robin’ (V3) is aged 19 years and lives in Melbourne. Robin came into care at the age 8 years and had 13 placements which included foster and residential care. She became pregnant when she was 16 years old and has daughter. When she was 17 her Residential worker was able to secure her a Transitional Housing property and referred her to a Leaving care service. During the first wave interview she was highly agitated and frustrated because she had to leave her house and stay with friends because she had been assaulted by her neighbours and it was in an unsafe area (high drugs and crime). This meant that she did not feel safe to live at that property.

Furthermore, the DHS was concerned about the safety for her daughter:

I'd been living there for a year and a half because they'd put me in a place and the neighbours put a knife to throat and said that if I don't leave they're going to kill me and my daughter, so I left and I've been living with my grandparents. I haven't put in any referrals for anywhere except for housing. I haven't put any other referrals for other agencies. And then they told me on Thursday that I have to leave my grandparents otherwise they're taking my daughter and putting her into foster care. Even though that on Monday I went to court and I have unlimited access with my daughter and they've just turned around and said, oh no your unsafe, you can't be near her, you can't stay over with her for the night, after a year and a half. And I've done nothing wrong.

She described her situation:

I've lost my daughter because of all this shit that's gone down. The judge has told me personally, if I get a house, he's going to give me back my daughter straight away. I can't get a house; I can't get my daughter, that's a simple thing. I mean I have no money for anything and like everything like that. Sometimes I have to take things, and I can't afford, like I have no money to get them. Like I have to pay a lot of bills, Like I have to pay the rent, I have to pay my phone bill, my food bill. I have to pay my transport bills, so it gets really hard.

In the follow-up interview, her situation and circumstances had improved with the support of her leaving care worker, access to a new housing property and brokerage funds:

My worker got my house... [the post care support service] helped me move all my furniture. They paid for the removalist to remove all the furniture. I moved in here. I set up everything and then what I didn't have they brought me... DHS brought the chest of drawers for my daughter because she didn't have any because she was coming back into my care I didn't have anywhere to put her clothes and [post care service] bought me a vacuum cleaner... They've given me TILA [Transition to Independent Living Allowance] \$1,500 to buy some new clothes and a laptop. My school that I'm going to get enrolled in is a home school, so I need a computer to be able to do my school work....

I had to give up this house and the rights to be put on a waiting list again. So at the moment I'm fighting to be put back on the waiting list because this is transitional housing only. So it's up to two years, but I've already been told that they can extend it and they're fighting for me to go back on the waiting list, but also what happened was a judge ruled that that house is unsafe for my daughter to live in, so it's unsafe for me to live in and a transfer had been put in place so, but they still didn't put me on the waiting list.

We asked her about the type of support she received from the post care support service who she had been working with for about two years. She noted how the worker's ability to

encourage and build her confidence were valued qualities:

So relationship was pretty good. It's a working relationship, but ... She cared about working with people. She supported people and she tried her best with helping her clients. She helped me with anything that I needed. If she thought I could do it by myself, she would ... encourage me to do it by myself. Other than that, she would help me pretty much with everything if I asked her to help. She didn't step in and say 'No, I'm going to do this, I'm going to do this, I'm going to do this'. She'd ask me, 'Can you do this, or do you want any help with this?'.

The 'strugglers' in Stein's study had experienced more maltreatment prior to care and continued to be disadvantaged and have high needs related to both physical and mental health (2012, pp.170-172). We did not delve into maltreatment histories, rather we noted that these young people tended to have more complex lives, were more likely to disclose mental health issues and not be accessing post care supports. Three of these five people had moved between interview one and two, with one (Q12) reporting three moves. None of these moves were seen as improvements. To gain a better sense of this group we offer the story of a young man aged 23 years. He had experienced a lot of instability in care, got involved in criminal offending behaviour which involved drugs, car theft, and gang culture. Involvement with the legal system continued to affect his life chances:

Yeah from the age of 10 to 15, in that time I did some pretty bad shit. When I left I got into gangs and shit in [inner Melbourne]. Starting meeting the wrong people and then we moved to [outer suburb of Melbourne]. So we all went out and started badging cars. And then one of my mates broke into a car and he's like 'Oh look there's money in here'. So then it went from taking the badges to let's break into all of the cars and get shit out of them. And then we got one started and so we started joy riding. And it just went from there. Once it comes into conversation that you've stolen cars then you meet people that do that shit and I was involved in gangs there, getting into fights and shit all the time. So when I was 10 years old I started smoking weed all the time and got into chroming. (V5, male, 22 years, Melbourne region)

He was never linked into any leaving care support service:

Pretty much when I left care, for about six months after I left care, I was sort of living at my grandparents and shit and hooked up with my ex wife and then I moved in with her pretty much straight away and that was fine and we were moving every six months for years because we fucked up the rent.

In the second interview he reported having been in a serious accident which has meant that he had been unable to work, had no money and his former girlfriend was pressing charges regarding domestic violence. When asked why he was living with his birth mother he stated that:

I earn \$1500 a week and I still couldn't afford to rent. Like in a private rental I had a look for the area close to my work it's like \$450 a week, \$400 and then ... I have a bad credit rating, so I can't get gas, electricity or water in my name so I'm screwed either way... I just I wouldn't be able to cope with living on my own. Like ... I love to cook. How do I make a meal

for one person? I'd make enough to feed 10 and then be eating it for the next six months, so it's too complicated to live on my own. So maybe hopefully, you know, maybe six months, maybe more, maybe 12 months I may move in with my new girlfriend, who knows. (V5, male, 22 years, Melbourne region)

This young man, like other participants categorised into the 'strugglers' group, continued to experience multiple issues around lack of access to support services, very constrained financial situation, limited education and associated opportunities and complex mental health difficulties. Stein found that many in this group experienced significant social and emotional challenges, together with structural disadvantage and, while appreciating aftercare support, found that it was less likely to alleviate their deep-seated problems. This is consistent with the findings of Johnson et al. (2010).

Case study 4: Struggling with complex problems

'Faye' (Q12, female 19 years, Toowoomba region) came into care at the age of 13 years, she had five placements - three with foster care and two in Residential Units. She disclosed to us that she was physically assaulted in care by a foster carer which led to placement breakdown. The Department put her into a Residential home at the age of 17 years. However, she did not feel ready to live independently and left to be on the street (primary homelessness):

The Department was just pushing me into independent living and I wasn't ready and I wasn't in the right frame of mind for it, so I just sort of took off.

I was 17 when I was on the street... I ended up staying at a squat with this guy ... and I had to do things just to stay safe. I slept under bridges. In car parks, at someone's house that I didn't know, because they were throwing a party, so everyone just went over there and we all slept there for the night, and we're in parks and sometimes at that Roma Street bus stop. And sometimes in the hotels - we got rooms off guys that we didn't know... When is it not scary to not have a stable accommodation?

A lot of the guys in the squats that I had stayed at, would steal food and stuff for us to eat. And to stay sane there were drugs and alcohol, don't ask me how they got that, but they did. It's sanity for when you're on the streets.

Faye was able to access some support from crisis and short term youth accommodation providers e.g. youth shelters, however her experience was varied:

[Youth Service name], I went to them a couple of times. They got me into a couple of different places. And yeah, we got phone numbers and stuff for homeless shelters and they'd ask us questions before they'd take us in. In a homeless shelter, they lock up your stuff, they take your phones. It's terrible. You share, there's one bedroom and there's like five beds in that one room and you have to share that room. Yeah, I got asked quite a lot of questions. I got asked why everything was happening; I got asked a lot of things, some

things insanely weird and some not so weird.

As Faye was still a ward of the state, the Department was reportedly informed about her current situation and made her sign documents, without linking her into any type of support service or stable housing. She described her feeling of being abandoned:

They found out what was happening ... the day before I turned 18 actually, my CSO came down to Brisbane and made me sign papers so that they weren't responsible for me anymore... Which shouldn't be right, I reckon they should wait for people to be 21 before they force them. When he made me sign these, I started crying because they hadn't helped me, but in some way I also knew that if I did go back to Toowoomba, there wouldn't be anyone to help me, so all my training wheels were gone, I was just dumped and it's like walking on a pirates plank and their pointing knives at you pushing you away.

Over a 12month period (18-19years), Faye's housing trajectory post care included:

- Moving in with her Auntie (stayed with her few months)
- Moved back with her biological mother (only lasted for 1 month, got kicked out)
- Moved in with boyfriend (relationship broke down)
- Became homeless (on the street)
- Moved in with brother (few weeks)
- Rented multiple 'Single rooms' (this would break down due to other house mates making sexual advances, arguments)
- Sharing a room with friends

At the second wave interview, she remained highly vulnerable. She had moved three times (in 5 months) and was now back with her biological mother, she was living in the garage while she tried to find her own place:

Well the house that I was at, they asked me to move out because my room was always a mess, because like I don't know. I paid rent for that room, so them kicking me out because of that wasn't nice. And then the house after that, well I found out that they were doing drugs and stuff, so I couldn't be around there, so now I'm here.

She was experiencing significant mental health issues and was very frustrated with the lack of support services available to her:

I've gone to pretty much everywhere that I could down here for help and everywhere has said they can't help me.... Well at the moment I'm on quite a few different medications from the doctor and my Grandmother thinks I've got Bi-Polar and she's a nurse. So we're going to go see a guy soon and talk to him about it all.

(Note that in this instance the interviewer provided referral information to local services and linked the young person to CREATE Foundation support).

This section has examined the data where two interviews were held with the young person so that we could gather information about the dynamics of their lives over a period of time, the issues they experienced, and the supports and services they accessed and found helpful. As indicated in the cases above a range of issues and challenges co-existed for these young people, interacting in various ways with their capacity to experience stability in their living situation. Issues included mental health issues, drug and alcohol issues and importantly an often rocky path in developing a constellation of social support a key elements of which is their emerging family of destination.

There is a tendency to assume that instability is necessarily a bad thing. Many young adults move numerous times as they engage in education, training, relationships and travel. Numerous returns to stay with their family of origin in combination with various share and rental accommodations is commonplace. Certainly there is instability in a young person's life that acts as a barrier to developing relationships to people, education and community that are necessary for wellbeing. Both to be expected and instability associated with risk of homelessness is evident for this sample of young adults in the period following leaving care. For example, numbers of young people in the sample were generally very happy to move to a 'better place' with better being judged on a number of factors, including the sense of control, safety, amenity and opportunity afforded by a particular place. This may be in transitional housing so long as they felt that future options were available and likely to be resolved in a way that was positive from their perspective. In many cases instability was a signal that they were protecting themselves physically and/ or emotionally by moving. Such safety seeking behaviour was often reported as not well understood or responded to by housing and child protection authorities.

The key difference to emerge between the two states where interviewees came from was the support received after leaving care, and their ease of access to stable accommodation and housing. In Victoria transitional housing for young care leavers, prioritised on the public housing waiting list and a formalised funded system of access to an aftercare support service provide some aspects of a systemic approach. By comparison in Queensland there is a less comprehensive and structured approach to post care support experienced by the young people interviewed.

Of particular resonance with the accounts of young people in this small study is the relevance of a continuum of responses from broad prevention aimed at structural and systemic factors, through early intervention, to enhanced accommodation and sustainable housing options and community engagement. The frame of early intervention into homeless pathways is indicated given the ongoing instability and often high risk of homelessness these young adults continued to experience after leaving care and beyond 21 years of age. This will be further explored in the next section of this report.

What young people consider would be useful

As a precursor to considering specific feedback it is useful to appreciate what it is young people seek in a broad sense. Appreciating their notion of 'home' and their aspirations for the future are essential aspects of their narratives.

Concept of 'home'

These young adults' notions of home fit comfortably with previous research identifying how young people who had experience of homelessness define 'home'. In a similar fashion to Crane et al.'s respondents (1996) our participants identified home with a sense of safety, belonging and being listened to (p.65). Also, like the SAAP clients in Moore et al.'s (2008) study, they spoke of having their own space and autonomy.

When young people in this study were asked how they would define a 'home' a number of themes were evident in responses. 'Home' to them meant:

- People: that home is where a particular person is, for example a grandmother, or partner. Having a 'bond' which means people do '*little things to show they care*'.
- Feeling safe.
- Continuity: a sense of 'ongoingness' (relational and/or spatial).
- A sense of autonomy and control: being able to do everyday things without having to ask permission, or being able to personalise their living space.
- Feeling happy and laughing with others.
- Providing amenity such as proximity to shops and transport.

A home is somewhere you feel safe and happy and you have people around you that you like. Like I'd say it's warm and inviting. (V200, male 21 years, Geelong)

Just hanging out there and like laughing and just being happy, like having that like, that bond I guess. And just feeling like I could walk into the house and I'd open the fridge and I'd pick out what I wanted and I'd go to what was my room and you know, whatever. (Q3, female, 20 years, Brisbane region)

But my grandmother's has always been home. It's always been somewhere that I can go. (V12, female, 23 years, Melbourne region)

Somewhere where I can like feel safe and wanted and needed and not have to like hide anything and where I can know that I'll be there for a long time. (Q20, female 19 years, Toowoomba region)

Because it's my own... I walk in there, I'm like it's my couch, it's my ornaments, it's my kitchen, it's my bathroom. Yeah it's all my stuff. I feel at home because it's mine everywhere. I'm not walking into the kitchen having to ask for a key or I'm not having to rely on other people to help me pay rent. As much as it's hard at the moment, it's good to have that independence. (V8, female 19 years, Melbourne region)

Some responded by saying they had never had a home whilst a number of others talked in functional rather than in relational and emotional terms.

My natural instinct is to up and go and just move around because I've had a very rough background. I just don't have that feeling it's like it's ok to settle down. (V9, female, 22 years Melbourne region)

The young people from Victoria generally spoke more easily about the topic typically referring to a range of the above positive features about 'home' and grounding this in past and present experience of 'home'. The responses from young people in Queensland were somewhat less positive, more functional and less grounded in the experience of having a 'home'.

I sort of feel like in a way I never really had a home. I've never referred to anywhere I've lived as a home, I generally call it a house. (Q11, female 23 years, Brisbane region)

I personally, I feel that home is where you make it. And it is home; it's a roof over my head. It's better than my previous situation, so I suppose it is like home. (Q200, female 19 years, Brisbane northside).

A sense of future

Recurrent in the way young people saw their own lives and in the way they judged how people engaged with them was wanting to feel they had a future, that they had dreams and aspirations. For example, as one young woman related:

I was just sitting around with my friends and just realized they were all addicted to drugs and alcohol, and none of them had future career goals, and they were probably going to end up on Centrelink or with three kids to three different guys for the rest of their lives and I just didn't want to be that. (Q3, female 20 years, Brisbane region)

The significant role that certain workers played in nurture their capacity to imagine and work to such a better future was evident across positive accounts. This was often expressed in terms of workers taking their goals seriously and encouraging them (sometimes quite assertively) to engage with and try possibilities. This resonates with other research into connecting young people who are marginalised with education and training (Crane, Durham and Kaighin 2012).

Whilst some of those with volatile pathways who continued to 'struggle' displayed less of this future orientation overall the young people interviewed worked on the possibility of a better future and in their own capacity (agency) to work towards this, albeit with the support and proactive encouragement of others.

Young people's views on designing a leaving care support service

In addition to the empirical data on what services young people actually used we also gathered more general opinions and views on ideas for leaving care support.

What should a leaving care support service offer?

During the first interview young people interviewed were asked: *If you could design a service for young care leavers what would it do?*

By far the most common response was the need for a place **where young people could go before and after leaving care to get information and advice on a wide range of matters**. The Victorian leaving care hotline was mentioned by a number of young people from that state as very useful.

Pretty much a call in service pretty much like the leaving care hotline, but a little bit more accessible. You know, everybody can just call up sort of stuff. ... Where you can go and ask what can I do, this has happened. Or who do you go and talk to about this. You know, someone who has that information on them already and can give you advice. (V4, female 23 years, Victoria)

A lot of my biggest problems have come from not knowing what to do, not knowing who to call about this, not knowing who I talk to about it, how to deal with it. And if I knew that there was someone that you could just call and ask a few of these questions, it would make a difference and people would make better choices I think. (Q11, female 23 years, Brisbane region)

I didn't really know who to call for help, or I can't. I've kind of always found it hard to ask for help, so by the time I was asking for help it was desperate and I was trying to sort it out by myself and stuff. And like by the time I got around to asking for help it was just like I was just so far gone.. (V203, female 19 years, Melbourne region)

One other young person suggested a **hub type model** with one service that acted as a link to all the services they might need.

Many participants disclosed mental health concerns and argued that services needed to be responsive to these needs. **Emotional and mental health support** was described by many as essential, preferably offered in addition to the transition planning process.

I would say a lot more compulsory help on like mental preparation for transition, so I guess like a counselling service as well, in addition to all the planning. (Q3, female 20 years, Brisbane)

[The Dept] need to realise that they can't just dump people. They need to realise that some people aren't capable and some people are. They can't just treat us all the same, we're all different.... Cause mental health problems do get worse too... My depression has gotten a lot worse since they've left me and I just want them to open their eyes. (Q12, female 19 years, Toowoomba)

Some young people stated it wasn't until after they were no longer eligible that they found out that leaving care services and supports were available for them. Therefore they recommended the provision of such **information and support while in care**. For example,

Really I think that my complete adolescent experience if I had of had a supportive [Dept] worker, knew all the programs and the grants and then been able to access somewhere that wasn't prison like, or somewhere safe and secure where I wasn't going to get raped or whatever, I think that would have been a real difference. (V3, female 19 years, Melbourne)

Access to housing was another common theme in responses. Several young people indicated that they wanted somewhere that negotiated their housing with them, that didn't just set up the accommodation without a young person's knowledge in a location that made it difficult to access schooling or work. Making sure young people were put on the public housing wait list early and whilst in care was also suggested as an important design element. Other young people indicated that the key need was for a service that would house young people leaving care safely and comfortably. Such support should be individually tailored to each young person. One young person expressed the benefit of early intervention so that people did not have to spend time homeless while waiting for a place. Several argued that accommodation should not just automatically stop when a person reached 18 years.

Others noted that **support should extend beyond the point where a young person was settled in a place** as their living situation can deteriorate quickly. This was the experience of one young woman:

Support for them not just once they're in their own house or whatever, but right up until they're completely stable ... I had the support of the leaving care worker right up until I got into my own house, I got my house furnished. Everything was going fine for a couple of months, and everything was great, and the next minute they pulled out because that was the end of the service, they'd done their job. And then everything kind of went downhill with my ex partner with the abuse, I didn't know who to turn to get help for that and a few different issues, like financial issues. (V6, female 20 years, Melbourne)

Education and training support was also noted including the availability of **life-skills training**. Such as cooking and maintaining clean accommodation. It was noted that this coaching should be diverse and individualised in accord with what the young person wanted to achieve.

A number of young people pointed out the importance of **a service/ workers who would advocate for them** indicating that their experience is that this resulted in much faster and more favourable responses than when they advocated for themselves, reflecting their relative powerlessness in negotiating with systems.

Some young people by virtue of a disability experienced specific needs and challenges that could not be met when they left care.

Mobility equipment is expensive. The Department paid for all of it when I was growing up so now I'm like 'what do I do?' I have to pay half which is \$700. It's the first time I've had to pay for something and I don't know what to do. Queensland focus group for young people)

Who should deliver leaving care support?

A large majority of young people interviewed (n=17) indicated that their preference was for a post care support service to be delivered by a non-government organisation. Four young people indicated this should be a departmental responsibility. A few young people saw the need for a partnership approach and one young person identified in this the departmental role of accountability and monitoring the quality of service provision. Focus group data was similar.

What age should leaving care support be available till and from?

A large proportion (n=17) indicated that the age of leaving care support should be extended to 25 years of age. Another four indicated ages between 22-24 years. Their view on the age leaving care support should commence ranged from whenever a young person starts to be independent of out of home care, to 15 years of age, to 16 or 17 years, with most nominating 15 years of age.

There was also a view that chronological age was not the key determinant but rather the young person being able to cope when active support was withdrawn.

Case management should continue until the worker can see that the young person is ready to care for themselves and they need to SEE that you can care for yourself rather than have a checklist of things they think you can do. (Young person at a Victorian focus group)

Worker qualities, characteristics and practices central to effective support

The young people spoke of having someone to talk to that they trusted. Young people interviewed talked of the importance of staff at various government and non-government agencies being more approachable and 'friendly', understanding of the vulnerability of young people in care, and how this vulnerability caused their criminal or aberrant behaviour. This included youth shelter, police and youth justice staff.

Some, most from Victoria, identified how departmental workers had helped them while they were in care with returning to live with preferred carers, access education and gain transitional housing. Queensland focus group participants identified Children's Commission staff as particularly helpful. Some acknowledged the work of departmental staff in arranging for individual financial support.

A broader view would suggest that young people in care, particularly those with volatile pathways or abusive experiences, should have access to independent, trusted support provided by professionals with sufficient training in abuse and trauma recovery to provide support to the young person, and provide a link to decision makers in the child protection, housing/ transitional accommodation and education/ training systems. Further investigation of the character of such pre and post leaving care support is warranted.

This research study identified that the type of professional support that made a key difference to young care leavers was having a caseworker/youth worker who was able to:

- Provide emotional and mentoring support for young person (e.g. encourage them to complete school, remain positive);
- Assistance in navigating bureaucracy or various government services (e.g. filling out forms, attending meetings with Centrelink, Housing, education providers);
- Assistance in developing independent life skills (e.g. learning how to manage budget, prepare meals, use public transport);
- Advocating for the young person (e.g. securing transitional housing, assist with school related tensions);
- Assistance in addressing issues related to substance abuse, mental health, parenting and relationships more generally.

Many of the ideas about service provision to prevent or address homelessness focused on the kind of relationship they hoped for with workers. Continuity, respect and workers being proactive were the key cluster of attributes wanted.

Having the **time to build a relationship** with their worker was important to these young people. The comments below were made at focus groups.

Every time we'd get close they'd move away or get pregnant.

It was heart breaking because you'd have to start again.

I guess so because I've had many, many, many people involved and sometimes you don't know what half of them are doing.

There was only a small amount of prep for changing workers.

When asked about the minimum period of time to have a particular worker the vast majority of young people (n=25) said it was preferable to have the same worker for at least 12 months. Table 7 below indicates the period of time young people thought should be a minimum with most indicating this should go beyond 21 years.

Table 7: Minimum period of time to have a particular worker

6 months	3
12 months	11
2 years	6
Open	5
Unsure	1

As this young woman from Melbourne speaks about her close and respectful relationship with her worker we can begin to understand how continuity means young people can keep 'moving forward' with someone who is knowledgeable about them:

It means we have a relationship.... And we're very close. I can tell her almost anything about my life and not be worried and I know I can trust her and I know she's going to be there for me. Whereas I've had workers who have come in and out of my life so often and have stayed for maybe a few months and by that stage I've just built up a relationship and they're gone again. I've got to start again. Whereas with my worker I'm able to keep moving forward and not step backwards all the time. And she also knows me, she knows my problems. Even without me knowing that I've got a problem with something, she knows, because she picks up on it. She knows my body language, she knows my facial features, she knows when something's wrong. (V2, female 22years, Melbourne)

Young people also told us they could understand that workers, for a range of reasons, need to move on but argued that doing **good changeovers help keep the young person informed and involved**.

Workers who are proactive (she made sure I ...) motivating and encouraging were also highly valued as young people moved toward a more complex adult life. Many reported that support for young people in care and post care should include some form of proactive monitoring, that is that a key worker who checked in with them on regular basis. This point is further canvassed later in this report.

I think probably sort of having, like having an extension of your case worker, so say your child your CSO or whatever, if you sort of maintained a relationship, not necessarily with them, but with someone who had specialised knowledge, but just having someone that saw you once a month and checked up with you and that there was still regular contact. That had to do with a monitoring sort of system. (Q3, female, 20years, Brisbane)

The following quotes show how worker characteristics and practices are embedded in and give character to the nature of interventions designed to motivate and support.

She fought for me to get my Centrelink money. She fought for me to stay in my placement, she made sure I got into a lead tenant property and that I was safe. Yeah, made sure I was attending school too.... [She made me feel I was being heard because] she always used to keep in contact with me and used to always hear me out... She was really friendly, like nice caring person too.... While I was in lead tenant I had another worker and she used to make sure that I went to school. She'd be at my door at 8 o'clock in the morning banging on my window, 'Get up for school'. But she helped me out heaps. She made sure I had a clothing allowance, you know everything was covered for school excursions, you know just all that kind of stuff. (V1, female 20 years, Melbourne)

Similarly, another Melbourne woman who was a young parent involved with the child protection system, when asked 'Who has been most helpful for you', replied:

[XX Service] because they're the only ones there for us... She's just been there for support, she's driven me places when I need too, she's advocated for me. She's pretty much been there in any way that I've needed... [Other services like the child protection services] have set plans on where we've got to go. Not, ok! There's another problem. Let's stop and deal with that. That's more important. (V2, female 22 years, Melbourne)

A number of young people also mentioned the value of having a mentoring program where young people previously in care had contact with them on a regular basis.

Young people's views about transition from care support practice

The desired 'character' of support

There is absolute uniformity in the accounts of young people regarding the central characteristics of good practice from their perspective. Broadly speaking these relate to the foci of practice ie what young people valued getting assistance with such as financial support, and the qualities of practice and the practitioner, such as interest, responsiveness and personableness. Less often specific models of service are referred to.

Themes of timely emotional and practical support flexibly provided in a 'youth friendly' manner resonate in the accounts of young people who did have NGO after care support. Desired services and practice characteristics for those with relatively smooth transitions tend to focus on the need they feels to access practical support when they need it. For such young people easily accessible information, advice, referral, and financial support when they hit a hurdle are highly valued.

Occasionally we have financial assistance so that you're not on your own, especially when you're relying on a Centrelink payment, if you haven't had a job, or if you've been having trouble finding a job, things can become quite tight on the budget. And occasionally you'll get like this big bill and you won't be able to pay it all and troubles arise from there and sometimes it's just useful to be able to go to someone look I just need a little bit of help with rent, or something like that. (V4, Indigenous female 23years, Sale, Victoria)

The leaving care hotline service in Victoria was mentioned by a number of young people as useful for periodic 'on call' responsiveness.

So it's like going the extra mile. Being able to, one of the major qualities for him was he knew what he was talking about and he knew the services that could help. So he was really clued with what was around. Knew where to get things. He came to help me kind of set up my house. So even though it was mine and things got moved to where I wanted them, he helped me move in. (V6, female 20 years, Melbourne)

As noted above worker continuity was also an important feature of good practice to young people with many commenting on how disruptive and destabilising it was to have regular or unannounced changes in departmental or leaving care support staff.

Young people's views about specific good practice principles

Interview ideas about good practice for transition from care practice were used to develop a list of principles for leaving care support. The list was also informed by principles were drawn from the Reconnect Good Practice Principles for early intervention into youth homelessness (FaHCSIA 2011b) and developed into some fixed response questions for the second and combined interviews. Table 8 reports responses of the respondents (n= 24) ratings of these ten (10) specific principles in respect of how important each was for services to young people who have left care (Essential/ Important/ Not really important).

Table 8: Ranking of principles for leaving care support

N=24 (that completed this section)	Essential	Important	Not really important
Responds to a comprehensive range of areas of your life such as education, training work, relationship difficulties, your emotional and mental health (prompt for list below)	20	4	
Helps early when you begin to experience problems that might threaten your accommodation	19	5	
Provides a service that is easily accessed	17	7	
Has workers that are approachable	17	7	0
Provides a service that responds to you quickly when you have a problem	12	12	
Has workers that are knowledgeable about resources	16	8	
Gives you opportunities to give feedback and influence how the service develops	16	7	1
A service that is well connected to other agencies	16	6	2
Is culturally relevant to young people from different backgrounds	16	6	2
Plans what happens around your specific needs	14	10	

There was very strong endorsement from most of the young people interviewed for these principles. The level of engagement young people had in responding to these suggested they were not simply responding so as to be agreeable. Indeed many supplemented their rating of a principle with specific comments as to why they thought that principal was important. The relativities between the strength of overall responses are interesting. For example the overall strongest response was to in respect of the importance that post care support covers comprehensive support across a range of areas of their life including education, training work, relationship difficulties, emotional and mental health. Also highly rated in a relative sense was that such support helps a young person early when they begin to experience problems that might threaten their accommodation. These themes were

also strongly evident in both interview and focus group data. Less uniformly supported though still seen by the majority as essential was the cultural relevance of support and how well services were connected to other agencies. The vital importance for one young Indigenous woman of culturally safe supports, where she could develop a sense of trust in her workers, can be seen in the illustrative case below.

Case study 5: 'Jenny', a young Aboriginal young woman moving forward

Jenny is a 19 year old Aboriginal woman living in Melbourne region (V201), who had come into care at very young age. She said she had between 5 to 10 placements and was not placed with Aboriginal carers or with her siblings. At the age of 15 years she ran away from her placement and was homeless for the next 3 years. Over the past 12 months Jenny has been linked in with a Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency service and currently lives in a Transitional Housing unit.

Jenny described her in-care experience as follows:

I was placed in a group home first and then they started mistreating me and so I was playing up and they moved me to group homes and then foster homes and then staying with people I didn't even know in their own homes ... I don't get along with my family and I just got sick of them, so I did it the hard way ... My mum she was still drinking and she was still doing her old clients and I just said 'We've got a life to worry about' and then they separated me and my four brothers, me and my two sisters and brother. [I was put in] a resi home and then they moved me from that resi home to residence, It's not nice; you've got to do what they say or else you're going to get your money taken off you. There's no freedom there for any young person ever, to do what they want to do.

Jenny ran away from her placement and spent 3 years on the street:

When I was couch surfing and I was on the streets, sleeping on the streets, in the city... it wasn't nice. It was cold, cold concrete. People just walking past you and then when you ask them for loose change, people look at you funny... [I slept] underneath the aquarium bridge ... on the cold concrete.

Jenny did not receive any 'Transition planning' or any supports as she had been homeless from 15-18 years, and said she had no contact from the Department during that time. At the age of 18, Jenny decided to get her life back on track and asked for support. A health service helped

by writing a support letter. I just ... wanted to sleep in a normal bed and I wanted a house of my own, and I just sucked it all up and I went to all of these services and they said they can help me out but I just have to have patience.

There is growing body of research which highlights the issues faced by Indigenous young people accessing services and feeling marginalised and or experiencing racism/discrimination. One of the key factors that had major impact on 'Jenny' was that she did not trust anyone (either from the Department or NGOs), due to her in-care experience and post-

care experiences:

I was a really frustrated kid. I really hated everyone ... I always have. I'm still like it today. It's just me and my personal trouble. I don't like seeing people much. Because I've been like losing that connection and once I get attached to a worker, it's hard for me to get attached to another worker and no it's not fair on me.

When asked 'Is having the same worker for a period of long period of time important?'

Jenny replied:

Yes. Because it means I don't have to explain myself twice to any worker that's just started. And then when it's the same worker, they know what I'm actually going through, because they know the details I'm telling them.

With the proactive support of the health service, Jenny was able to be linked in with a VACCA service and has been with them for the past 12 months. The interview was conducted with her leaving care worker present. Over the past 12 months VACCA had been able to place Jenny into a Transitional Housing Unit, link her into Indigenous Arts program and secure her access to counselling support and a housing worker.

Jenny's case highlights the importance of building connections to her Indigenous community and as part of this having an Indigenous worker. Jenny was not placed with Aboriginal carers and was not linked in with an Aboriginal service when she was in care. She said she wished the Department had

put me around my people where I feel comfortable instead of me feeling I don't belong here, of being like thrown away.

There is clear support from these data for the proposition that the frameworks developed for early intervention into youth homelessness have a strong resonance with young people post care, who continue to experience levels of instability. The interviews also support strongly their view that this type of support is just as relevant whilst they are in care and would have a preventive effect on the level of future difficulties they experience. It is clear that these young people experience homelessness of varying types not as events but as a dynamic process of ongoing spatial and relational instability typified by repeated disconnection- re-connection. This renders them at risk of homelessness well into young adulthood and beyond unless they are able to embed sufficient stability into their lives on which to platform ongoing progress to adult wellbeing.

Proactive periodic contact post care

Young people were specifically asked in the second interview if they were agreeable to being contacted periodically after leaving care to see how they are going and link them to support if that was needed. Almost all young people indicated support for this. Indicative comments made in focus groups were:

Yes, it shows that they care.

A worker from my specialist service called me, the Department didn't.

It's a big deal if you have no-one. Unless you have a family you have no-one.

They [the Department] need to see if you're alright.

Only one young man who had a very volatile pathway clearly did not support this, and some others gave qualified support. A number of such caveats were indicated explicitly or implicitly in responses. First was the notion that they thought proactive engagement was warranted given their ongoing levels of vulnerability. It could not be assumed that because things were going well at a particular moment that this would continue. Second was that the character of such contact and engagement should be of the empathetic person-centered character referred to above. Without this such contact would be viewed as bureaucratic and problematic. Third that this contact should be from a non-government organisation or worker, preferably one they had a prior relationship with.

Preventing homelessness

Young people also shared their ideas about how to prevent homelessness which included, but went beyond services provided by transition or after care services. The most prominent suggestions made by young people on what could prevent young care leavers becoming homeless included:

- More support services for young care leavers until they reached 25 years of the character described above;
- Increased effort or mandatory requirements for transition from care planning;
- Improved access to public housing and suitable accommodation;
- Improved service responses from adult- services in addressing issues related to young care leavers access to education or employment opportunities, addressing mental health issues and substance misuse and financial budget management.

In particular, we noted that they spoke of the how mainstream services could take a more active role in preventing homelessness.

This ends the presentation of data from young people regarding their experiences of homelessness and their experiences and ideas about how to better address the needs of children and young people in care and post care to prevent homelessness. In the following section ideas from service providers are reported prior to discussing the implications of the data.

Service provider views about transition from care support

In March and April 2013, a series of individual and focus group meetings were held with key stakeholders to gather their knowledge and practice wisdom about:

1. In care and post care supports available to young people; and
2. Critical areas for practice development in terms of understanding and addressing in care and post care experiences of young adults with respect to preventing and responding to homelessness.

Forums were conducted in both Victoria and Queensland. The forums provided an opportunity for the community service providers to articulate what they saw as the key elements for supporting a young people's transition from out of home care to independence; and the reality of the transition experience and the opportunities for improvement. The purpose of this section is not to compare the two states but to indicate key themes and tensions raised.

Three key themes emerged: complexity of life situation and care history; accessing resources and supports, and the importance of collaboration. Each of these was critical in supporting the young person to access and maintain affordable and appropriate housing or accommodation.

Complexity of life situation and care history

Practitioners referred to a wide range of aspects of the young people's lives that are best summarised as requiring them to deal with complexity. One practitioner remarked that for young people leaving care homelessness occurs from the vantage point of already 'in chaos lives'. Most obvious to them is complexity in the lives of the young people though it is clear that systems complexity creates substantial challenges for workers undertaking support of young people leaving care. Aspects of complexity referred to included:

- Responding to the needs of young people in care leaving detention and the importance of connecting young people with support services before this took place;
- The unrealistic expectations of many of the young people leaving care living independently at 18 years;
- The importance of appreciating and responding to cultural contexts.

Whilst practitioners referred to a wide range of strategies they employed or would like to employ this was almost always in the context of looking for support strategies relevant to the particular needs and contexts of individual young people in preparation for or after leaving care. Practice needed to be highly tailored to each individual young person.

Accessing resources and supports

In response to client and systems complexity practitioners referred to the substantial efforts made by them and their services to identify, access, maintain and problem solve links to both formal and

informal resources needed for a young person leaving care to achieve a level of stability in living situation. A number of foci for this stood out these being:

- The very limited availability of housing options, and thus need to build relationships with transitional housing, social housing and real estate agents for the private rental market. The Queensland forum indicated that most young people they see present with housing needs.
- Supporting the young person build social relationships which provide support and connection post care. This ranged from enhanced links to birth family, extended family, foster family and to more recent relationships e.g. with partners. The concept of needing to orient such support to the young person building their family of destination was seen as relevant.

The importance of collaboration

Collaboration and planning between the statutory department, the young person and the service system that can support during and post transition, was seen as critical. In Queensland practitioners spoke of a culture of crisis planning. They reported that young people commonly have to wait until near their 18th birthday before planning, if any, begins. This is especially so for young people whose situation is characterised by a high degree of complexity, for example a history of multiple placements and/or challenges. Neither, the young person nor the service system they are about to encounter are seen as adequately prepared or resourced for this. Similarly generic community support and informal family or social support are not sufficiently resourced to be activated to address these young people's diverse and often complex range of needs.

In addition to the above themes in common participants at the Victorian stakeholder meetings identified the following areas for practice development:

- **Leaving care service support needs to be expanded and consistently available** across the state, appropriately funded, with dedicated positions to accommodate for the estimated number of young people leaving care each year.
- There should be **improved access to public social housing** for young care leavers, and an increase in the number of transitional housing properties. Alongside this is the need to facilitate referrals for young people from 16 years of age (e.g. currently Public housing will only accept referral application once young person turns 18 years of age).
- **Increase funding for mentoring programs** for young care leavers as this is seen as assistants that enables young people to pursue further studies, seek work and build life skills.

The feedback from the Queensland stakeholder meetings identified the following areas for practice development, reflecting some similar concerns but also indicating the current differences in service provision and policy implementation:

- Queensland government needs to **fund a state-wide leaving care support service** (currently Qld does not have one), which can provide support for young people from the age of 15 to 25 years regardless of where they live in the state.

- The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services needs to ensure CSOs **consistently apply policy regarding transition from care planning**. Stakeholders reported that various offices and regions have different practices and not all young people have a transition from care plan
- **Increase access to public social housing** properties for young care leavers, as there does not appear to be any specific youth housing options for young care leavers in Queensland.

Stakeholder feedback supports the conclusion that leaving care support systems in both states need further development.

Discussion

This study commenced with a number of questions it sought to explore. Each of these is substantial in itself. As a small ‘scoping’ study the goal was to gain a sufficient sense of what young people leaving care were saying so as to suggest areas for further and deeper exploration.

The questions set out at the beginning of this study were:

- 1 What is the post care experience of young people who leave care in terms of homelessness and risk of homelessness? This will be examined in terms of:
 - their access to, and experience of accommodation/ housing,
 - any experiences of homelessness,
 - engagement in education, training and/ or work,
 - engagement with own social support networks, including family or origin (broadly defined), and other social and community networks,
 - experiences of personal vulnerability and need,
 - engagement with social services of various kinds,
 - sources of economic support,
 - the support received from state care agencies as part of transition from care support,
 - other experiences they consider important to their post care wellbeing.
- 2 What do young people with a care experience who have been homeless (whether this be pre or post leaving care) consider was or would have been useful in their case?
- 3 What are the practice and policy implications of the research findings for both in care policies and practice, and post care policy and practice?
- 4 How can further investigation of post care experiences be structured so as to inform enhanced policy and practice for transition from and post care experience?

In the following discussion the data from this study is reflected on and a number of considerations for answering the above questions discerned.

Previous studies in Australia have explored the above questions to varying extents though not in respect of Queensland. The accounts of young people and service providers from our study supports

what these other studies have found about the various factors and paths that mean young people in care are so vulnerable to homelessness (Mendes et al., 2011b; Stein, 2012). Themes in this body of work include disconnection from family or origin, numerous often negative placement and in care experiences, sporadic and uneven engagement and transition planning from Departments and those officers who are their primary contact, difficulties in accessing and sustaining accommodation and housing in the years after leaving care, and limited access to and progression in education, training and work. These difficulties occur against a backdrop of trend for young adults in Australia to have delayed economic independence and an assumed need for family sponsorship well into their twenties. In this context the gap between the statutory age of leaving care and the capacity of young people leaving care to be independent of explicit support is widening.

This study found useful the distinction between young people who experience smooth or volatile pathways in transitioning from care (Johnson et al., 2010). A *'smooth transition'* was typified as successful, with fewer placements whilst in care, where the young person felt involved in planning process, and where they left care at later age. A *'volatile transition'* described young people who experienced problematic transition, with multiple placements, experiences of physical/sexual abuse prior to or whilst in care, and where they left care in crisis at a younger age usually into inappropriate accommodation (e.g. youth refuge or boarding house). This AHURI study identified that those young people who experienced *'volatile'* transition experienced difficulty in securing stable housing, multiple accommodation breakdowns, received limited professional support and where substance abuse and mental health problems destabilised their housing (p3). Stein's (2012) typology of young people's post care trajectories compliments the smooth-volatile distinction and was used to better understand the post care experience of our sample.

Research into post-care experiences suggests that the degree of placement stability in care will be predictive of the nature of future transitions. We identified a similar tendency in the participants' pathways in that those who had a generally stable placement and care experience remained with the same carer for a number of years tended to have more stability in post care housing. They had generally been referred to and found useful leaving care and other services together with ongoing support through various relationships. Those who had a volatile pathway whilst in care had variable outcomes. Some had substantial experiences of ongoing homelessness (the *'strugglers'* group), in both housing type and felt senses. They tended not to have been referred to specific leaving care support and had less sustained support from other services accessed. Others who had more positive post care trajectories (*'moving on'* group) indicated by increased levels of felt stability, had at least one influential personal relationship with continuity where they felt cared about, as well as support from a service over substantial period of time. Such services (often a specific worker) took a comprehensive approach to supporting that young person be and feel connected to themselves (mental health), to education and work, and to a stable place to reside, as well as assisting with advocacy, advice and the development of problem solving skills. Interestingly such services tended to have a target group which extended to 25 years. These were generally not specific leaving care services though the small size of the sample means this should not be assumed as applying more broadly.

Our analysis also indicates that stability in terms of reduced risk of homelessness is understood relationally rather than simply as a function of the frequency of shifting placement or the status of the housing occupied. Across the sample connections with particular members of their family of

origin, foster carers and their families, partners, peers and caseworkers were identified as important, at times critical sources of support. Young people's narratives indicate that as they leave care as young adults they are actively seeking and developing new and revised close relationships which can usefully be understood in terms of emerging families of destination. Both access to suitable housing, and relationships within shared accommodation and/or with neighbours, were reported as often problematic.

The path away from homelessness was typified by one or more close positive relationships where they felt they were cared about, access to housing which provided a space where there they had a sense of control as well as proximity to relational and practical resources, and access to education and work consistent with feeling they had a future. Similar to Johnson et al. (2010) the more volatile the in care pathway the more difficult this constellation of factors was to achieve and sustain. Leaving care support appears to most rapidly assist those who have moderate levels of need and complexity in their circumstances. Those with relatively smooth transitions also benefit enormously from this support as it supplements other resources they have to draw on. Those with highly complex volatile pathways who Stein categorises as 'strugglers' tend to have highly conflicted institutional relationships with justice, housing and child protection systems. Finding a path away from homelessness for this group appears to be about finding and supporting very specific and fragile opportunities for building stability. Comprehensive sustained support is critical for this group, though the form of this support needs to utilise practice approaches specifically suited to responding simultaneously to individual and systems complexity. This needs further exploration. Furthermore, facilitating a smoother in care experience which attends to the building of young people's pool of positive social connections and educational and vocational opportunity is likely to have a preventive effect in respect of homelessness.

The field of homelessness research and practice has since the 1980's held a tension within it. On one hand there is the need to define homelessness in terms of the accommodation and housing status of a person- primary, secondary and tertiary forms of homelessness have been specified and inform policy and response development (Heerde et al., 2012). On the other hand there is a 'lived' homelessness, typified by feelings of not having a 'home', one that reflects a personal sense of lack of attachment, belonging, safety, continuity and control (Mallett, 2004). This is the 'felt' and spiritual dimension of homelessness. These two orientations to homelessness, the cultural and felt, are not discrete, but are both clearly evident in the accounts of the young people in this sample, are interrelated, and fuel each other.

In respect of young people taken into the child protection system and located in out of home care dimensions of felt homelessness are clearly evident in many of the young people's accounts of their in care experience and post care experience. For these young people who can be seen to have a volatile journey in care, this at times involves homelessness in the cultural sense, where they are on the streets, couch surfing, or in sub-standard accommodation. Many more times they are homeless or 'becoming' homeless in the felt sense. Some experience family homeless prior to coming into care. Whilst there is evidence that many young people consider they have had a positive out-of-home experience it is apparent that this is generally less so as their path becomes more volatile.

A **temporal lens**, recognising that homelessness develops over time, is important in the consideration of how homelessness can be prevented for young people leaving care (Johnson et al.,

2010). This study heard this thematic in a number of forms. Young people's accounts of how what happened whilst they were in care could assist or pose barriers to their accommodation stability and sense of belonging. Some of those working with young people, including those located in peak bodies and in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection, suggested that the prevention of homelessness for these young people needed to start with much better support for young people's families and communities before they come into care. A temporal lens underpins recent improvements to our understanding of intergenerational homelessness (Flatau et al. 2009). In respect of our specific focus on the nexus between leaving care and the prevention of homelessness is clearly evident in the lives of young women with children. Six of the twenty seven young people interviewed in this study had children and it was clear that these young women and their children, and young women in care more generally should be an important focus for intergenerational homelessness prevention.

An extension of this temporal frame is the extent to which the analysis of a young person's situation and the focus of practice is subtly oriented to their 'future' or 'past'. The accounts of the young people we interviewed are clearly grounded in their own quest for a future, though they were often dealing with their 'present' in a practical sense. For those who have had a relatively smoother journey and good quality support and connectivity along the way the horizon of this **future orientation** may be well into the future, positive and confident. Such young people can express their emerging aspirations with some confidence, and have energy for pursuing these. As with many young adults the specificity of their ambitions may change but there is an underlying confidence that they can and will have a positive future. Conversely there are some young people, most notably the 'strugglers', who have very limited aspirations, often not extending beyond the next week. There are many young people in our sample whose level and scope of aspiration was somewhere between these.

At the systemic level the historical mindset of child protection has been anchored by concern about harm to children from their families of origin (Uliando & Mellor, 2012). Statutory focus has largely (though not exclusively) been on assessment, engagement with families of origin, out of home placement when considered necessary, and support whilst in out of home care. There are a number of implications of this when considering the data from this study. First is that young people's connection to family has largely been conceptualised in terms of their family of origin, that is, birth parents, step parents, associated extended family, and the 'family' provided through various out of home care, adoption and permanency planning models. Yet in the accounts of young people leaving care there is a strong family of destination narrative, and it is this family of destination that can be argued as providing a significant protective effect against future homelessness.

As with young adults generally, 'family' is a dynamic set of relationships which change over time (Schofield, 2002). Our family of destination usually includes some but not all of our family of origin as some relationships translate into our adult lives and others do not. Close friends become 'like family' and partnering and having children add new people and networks. We know family connections are a key part of wellbeing (Raman et al., 2005). The young people we interviewed are generally struggling to form viable families of destination. For young women partnering can bring with it renewed instability, violence and housing insecurity, and children. For young men we interviewed there was often a sense of how important partnering was to them as a way of gaining meaning in their lives but also a sense of fragility and time limitedness. Recontact with their own

families of origin may sometimes have elements of trying again to see if things have changed, but far more evident was the way the young people were making judgements about what type of relationship they wanted to have with whom. That is, their engagement with members of their families of origin was part of what all people do- sustain and redefine connections that link our families of origin and destination.

Yet it is also apparent that young people leaving care need support in developing and sustaining relationships that they can move forward with. A number specifically indicated that they needed someone to assist them connect to past family and friends, that the process and outcomes of rebuilding those links that could be positive was often difficult, emotionally and practically. Numbers also relayed how helpful it had been to have someone support them deal with current relationship conflicts and challenges. Overall there are strong grounds for in care and leaving care support to include support for young people's emerging constellation of supportive relationships and in assisting them to develop their relationship 'literacy'. A frame of relational interdependence rather than independence is indicated (Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2006).

The 'future-past' lens is also evident in views about how leaving care is conceptualised. The use of 'leaving care' and 'transition from care' language is fundamentally system centric and for young adults past oriented. This was commented on by some agencies and workers. More forward looking language is important ('transition to ...') but perhaps more important is consideration of the way leaving care is conceptualised in terms of goals. Using the 'responsible parent' lens the goal parents generally have is for their children to be able to have opportunity and a happy 'positive' life. Various frames have been suggested during this study about what the goal of leaving care should be including that of transition to 'independence' or 'adulthood'. Both constructs have limitations that have been discussed in the sociology of youth literature (see for example Wyn, 2009). The frame of wellbeing, if broadly rather than narrowly understood, and inclusive of a person's own understandings along with objective elements is consistent with the range of factors that young people and service providers indicate is their goal. There is interest in developing indicators which would allow the post care experience of young people to be monitored and inform the development of support strategies and this is an important project. When asked directly the young people in this study very clearly indicated they supported being periodically contacted after they left care to see how they were going, as long as this was of a particular character- voluntary, undertaken by NGO's, supportive and linked them to needed assistance. They see this as more than simply monitoring or gathering data for research and decision making but as a way that let them know people are interested in how they were going and as a way of getting further support if they need it.

A further lens which is indicated by the data of this study is that of support **bridging across the point leaving care**. The statutory distinction between child and adult provides for a key point of disjuncture which is essentially system centric. This is particularly true for young people who age out of care (that is leave care by virtue of reaching 18 years of age). Where support is differently structured around the statutory point of leaving care the abruptness of their transition is amplified, described by young people as a specific and dramatic change which often brings with it substantial stress and instability. Several young people in this study exited care directly into homelessness or became homeless shortly after as initial post care arrangements broke down. Conversely there are various ways this point of transition was bridged in the accounts of young people and service providers. These were both formal and informal. Formal bridging was achieved when a support

service which would continue to provide support well after leaving care became involved well before the young person left care. The relationship with the service and often with workers within this service provided continuity across the change in care status. Sometimes young people drew on previous relationships with workers in residential care or with care providers and this provided some insulating continuity across the point of leaving care. The implications for 'post care support' are that transitional support needs to be experienced by young people as bridging the point of leaving care, rather than be commencing at the point of leaving care. In order to effectively bridge, this support service needs to be able to move with the young person and not be tied to a particular placement provider.

In house transition planning by Departments may be presented as being a mechanism for bridging across the point of leaving care but for young people at significant risk of homelessness does not present as sufficient. Most importantly bridging needs to attend to a variety of needs the young person has in respect of where they will live, and provide the ongoing support they need to deal with a constellation of issues if they are to build a positive life.

It is apparent from even this limited amount of data that young people often conceptualise leaving care quite differently than the statutory authority. For young people it often means when they commenced independent living, in some cases in homelessness, and generally ceased to have regular contact with the department and out of home care services. For others who remained in out of home care until 18 leaving care was a point in time, and signalled an abrupt change to their status, sometimes that they were being abandoned, or that new accommodation and support arrangements commenced

The **critical importance of access to stable accommodation and housing** was clearly evident. This provides a basis for them moving forwards in their lives is central for many young adults. In the accounts of our sample central to this is clear availability of either private rental accommodation which is affordable, and experienced as safe, or transitional and supported housing options which in turn are linked to public housing. The more volatile the pathway of the young person the more they will need the latter. This generally correlates with a housing first approach with support that can continue to be accessed by the young person if they move, which should be expected and catered for.

As indicated above supporting young people developing their aspirations and hopes is a vital part of what could be termed **connection practice**. In the past twenty years the themes of connection and reconnection have emerged as central in programs targeting young people 'at risk' (the term is used cautiously) at both national and state levels. These typically see young people's connection to family, education, training, work and community as vital to broad prevention, as well as more individually focused early intervention. Such programs have been developed in respect of youth homelessness (e.g. the Commonwealth funded Reconnect program) and education and training (e.g. the Commonwealth funded Youth Connections program, state funded early school leaving programs). Leaving care support programs sit within this 'connection' frame in many respects. Critical aspects of connection practice include assisting young person develop their sense of hope and aspiration, to negotiate real and accessible options, and support young people have an enabling life context (Crane et al. 2013). The practice model suggested has commonalities with the community development support model proposed by Mendes (2011) in its concern with supporting young people developing

sustainable connections within the community (with key program foci around housing, employment and mentoring) through a partnership approach between professional social welfare workers / services and local community networks. In this sense service support performs a bridging and developmental role rather than simply constructing practice as case management or direct support provision.

Central to this study was the question of what young people who have been in care consider was useful or would have been useful. This is an important question for a number of reasons and one which is much larger than this study can comprehensively canvas. From the first wave of interviews it was apparent that the **breadth of issues and character of wanted support** young people spoke of resonated strongly with what we know about early intervention into homelessness practice. Most of the young people in this study (and their children) continue to be at risk of future homelessness. Even those who have become quite settled often only achieved this in the recent past. The frame of early intervention, whilst inappropriate in a child protection sense other than for the children of care leavers, is very appropriate in respect of young adults who have been in care. Such practice is conceptualised as a person centered approach which draws on a range of possible support and connection strategies in a flexible and responsive way across whatever mix of issues are rendering a young person vulnerable to homelessness. The Reconnect program has successfully delivered early intervention to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness (ARTD 1998, Ryan 2003, Barker et al. undated, FaHCSIA 2008) and the principles on which it is based have broad acceptance. These principles were strongly endorsed by young people in the interviews. A proactive early intervention approach seems to fit particularly well for those young people who are 'moving on' and 'survivors'. Many of the NGO leaving care services currently play this sort of role and their support is highly valued by the young people we interviewed.

Some of the young people in the study continue to be in highly volatile circumstances and are in and out of homelessness. Other research indicates this group is less responsive to support but still need and wants this support (Johnson et al., 2011; Stein, 2012; Stein & Dumaret, 2011). Clear ongoing individualised case management provided around safe secure housing, with specialist support for mental health and problematic alcohol and drug use, is indicated by the literature as most effective for this cohort (Gronda, 2009; Gronda et al., 2011).

In terms of the period of support young people in our sample even at 23 knew they continued to need access to **ongoing holistic and proactive support**. The need for an affirmative action support approach both prior to and after leaving care is advocated for and supported by other studies (Mendes, Johnson and Moslehuddin 2011c). Significantly almost all the young people involved in this study indicated they would like to see proactive contact be kept with them to ascertain how they are going, and what support they needed. It was clear that they had ongoing support needs associated with their journey from care beyond 21 years which is the current age which the state governments of Victoria and Queensland identify as the upper age limit for leaving care support. Twenty five years old was seen by most young people as an appropriate age for post care support to be available until, and this view was also mirrored by non-government service providers. At the policy level there are a complex of issues which enter at this point including the roles of national and state levels of government, the availability and priorities of funding, place based versus state wide mechanisms and access to support, and the interface between specialist, mainstream and informal supports. This requires further investigation.

6.POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS

Interviewer: So ideally from your experience a service for young care leavers needs to include ... ?

Well these are all things that if you were a normal child, from a normal home environment, these were the things you would get. If you were at home or not at home. Why should it be any different for someone in care? Why can't they when they've left care have that support and those things, options out there for them? (V2, female 22years, Melbourne)

The previous discussion suggests a range of policy and practice implications from this study. Most importantly perhaps is the need for policy and practice to situation in-care and leaving care support within a future and outcomes oriented frame, with support structured so as to recognise and build agency and interrelationships central to these young people's longer term wellbeing. This project is underway but this study supports the view that if being in care is not to be a pathway to future homelessness then much more needs to be done.

Both Queensland and Victorian governments were clearly interested in this project though their capacity to engage in discussing future possibilities as hoped for was constrained. The Queensland Inquiry into Child Protection understandably meant the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services did not feel it was in a position to discuss further possibilities for research given the recommendations of the Inquiry will first need to be considered by Government.

The Department of Human Services Victoria indicated it is committed to further understanding the in care and post care experience of young people holistically across a number of domains and vulnerability to homelessness is one of these domains. To this end Victoria indicated it is providing funding for the Beyond 18 longitudinal study on leaving care and is developing a 5 year plan for children in out-of-home care. These plans were committed to in the Victoria's *Vulnerable Children's Strategy*.

As already outlined earlier in the report, the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) identified that “*children and young people including those subject to or exiting care and protection*” as a target group for reducing homelessness (COAG, 2008, p3). This study provides further support for the efficacy of this interest.

One of the key policy gaps areas identified in this scoping study was the disconnect between leaving care and a number of other policy and practice arenas which impact on the opportunities available to young people leaving care and their risk of homelessness. Arguably these may be ameliorated by taking up the recommendation of the AHURI study by Johnson et al. (2009) to apply four key principles within the policy context of a leaving care:

1. *A leaving care framework needs to be applied nationally.*
2. *Government must acknowledge their responsibility to young people as their corporate parent.*

3. *Any leaving care framework, including proposed legislation, must acknowledge broader Australian Government initiatives in fostering social inclusion and in enhancing and supporting human rights.*
4. *Leaving care arrangement must include a stronger focus on both building on care leavers strengths and acknowledging where young people lack skills and resources. (pp.4-5)*

Our study identified the following specific areas for policy and practice development:

- Support should bridge across the point of leaving care and incorporate transition planning into a support process that is point in time oriented. The facilitation of this planning should not be located with the state Department or an out of home care provider
- Comprehensive transition support should be made proactively available to all young people in care from 15 to 25 years with the level of support commensurate with the needs of the young person and include connection to family (broadly defined), education, training, work and community. The Reconnect principles and positively evaluated leaving care services should be drawn on as an evidence base for this. State and Commonwealth funded services should be articulated to achieve this result.
- The high proportion of young people experiencing mental health difficulties indicates the development of specific support and referral strategies are required into young adulthood for young people leaving care.
- Ongoing support for all young people leaving care be available via a youth friendly state wide hotline in each jurisdiction that is available pre and post leaving care
- That support should focus on the longer term wellbeing of young people
- Involve clear pathways to private rental, transitional housing and public housing, and responsiveness to safety and mobility needs of the young person
- Develop and implement a communication, monitoring and support system to proactively and supportively engage with young people post care
- Recognise and support the need for young people to develop and sustain a range of relationships into adulthood which provide a platform for their long term relational wellbeing, which includes clear attention to the development of a young persons 'family of destination' and supporting the young person in this process.

7.FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

To further the areas for policy and practice identified above a number of broad recommendations are made. These are:

- **Recommendation 1:** *That action research is undertaken to develop voluntary monitoring and support activation processes available to all young people post care and which involve young people in and leaving care in their development and refinement.*
- **Recommendation 2:** *That the Australian and State and Territory Governments (through COAG) develop and establish a cross sector working party to develop a Nationally Consistent Leaving Care Framework with a focus on tackling homelessness for young people exiting the care system.*
- **Recommendation 3:** *That both the Queensland and Victorian Government develop a comprehensive housing policy for young care leavers, including improved referral pathways between Child Protection services and Public Housing services.*
- **Recommendation 4:** *That the Australian Government commission a national research study to examine and explore the intersection of young care leavers and intergenerational homelessness.*

This study provides support for the proposition that young people who have been in care should be proactively and voluntarily involved in periodic monitoring of their lived experience post care with linkage of such contact to the activation of timely multi-faceted individually tailored support. The young people involved in this study thought this was not only desirable but important. Whilst some young people will be in close contact with leaving care services many others will not. An empathetic approach to seeing how young people are 'travelling' post care is needed given the strong evidence that high levels of need can persist well into adulthood (see for example, Raman et al., 2005; Stein & Dumaret, 2011). The style of such engagement needs however to be of a character that young people perceive as friendly, supportive and useful. We suggest there is sufficient understanding of the domains of need that young adults leaving care have to now develop more specific ongoing monitoring tools and processes through participatory monitoring and action research. No doubt studies such as Beyond 18 will deepen this understanding. A more inclusive approach is indicated than simply developing a survey or checklist to be undertaken periodically by young people after they leave care. Participatory monitoring and evaluation processes allow for the development of indicators and signs of good outcomes that are meaningful to people at the community level (in this case young adults who have left care) and not just to managers and decision makers. Such an approach reflects the importance of utilising processes *with* young people in care and leaving care which acknowledge their personhood, agency and capacity to contribute voluntarily to processes which seek to support them.

A number of other research projects are suggested from this study. There is a paucity of research in respect of Queensland and further investigation is required particularly in respect of how young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people leaving care can be best supported in culturally relevant ways. The experience and service delivery implications in respect of CALD young people is also needed. In our study we had limited success in accessing young people who had experienced homelessness from both these cohorts and research is warranted that is specifically focused.

Further research is also needed using the intersecting frames of intergenerational homelessness and the formation of families of destination by young people in and post care. The high proportion, and how best to prevent homelessness and other unwanted outcomes such as ongoing mental health difficulties. More generally there is a need to investigate how a more future oriented approach to child protection, out of home care, and leaving care practice might assist in providing young people with the support, skills, and opportunities to develop as early as possible networks of support that can bridge across their in care and post care experience. Action research (Crane and O'Regan 2010) may assist in the development of more meaningful and effective transition planning and support mechanisms and could be directed at partnerships between Departments, service providers and action research facilitators with the active involvement of young people in care and post care in the inquiry process.

8.CONCLUSION

This study builds on earlier Australian research studies which have examined young care leavers and their experience of homelessness and housing instability. It provides further insight into the post care experience of young people who leave care in terms of preventing homelessness and risk of homelessness, and the character of support that this experience indicates is needed. A sample of 27 young people from Victoria and Queensland provided the major focus for data collection with 17 of these young people being interviewed twice providing additional depth and some longitudinal capacity. This was supplemented by consultations with service providers.

Key conclusions drawn include the importance of leaving care services in preventing further experiences of homelessness for these young people and that in care and post care planning and support processes need to be made more coherent, connected and comprehensive.

The study identified a range of factors which supported or undermined these young people's capacity to achieve greater accommodation and felt stability in the first years following leaving care. It also identified the perspectives young people regarding the character of support that was helpful to them. Further policy and framework development is needed prefab at a national level with active involvement of various jurisdictions. Further areas are suggested for research including the need for the development of a proactive approach to monitoring how young people are faring in the years linked to the activation of timely person-centered context responsive support.

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Appendix A: Participant Screening Tool

For use by CREATE staff when selecting participants from those who volunteer.

QUESTION	RESPONSE	NOTES	
EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS OR PRECARIOUS HOUSING SITUATION			
Have you been homeless at any time since leaving care?		These are threshold questions. If a young person answers NO to both these questions then they will not be selected for the interviews. They <i>may</i> be considered later for focus groups so continue with questions.	
IF NO ... Has there been a time when you were nearly homeless or spent more time than you wanted to in temporary housing?			
[If the volunteer appears unsure if their experience could be defined as 'homeless' or 'nearly homeless' you can give other examples of unsafe or precarious housing situations.]			
DEMOGRAPHICS			
Age			
Gender			
Location (postcode if known)			
Identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?			
Identifies as Pacific Islander?			
Other cultural affiliation?			
Language spoken at home?		Record if other than English	
Have you got any disability or other issue that we should consider if you come in for an interview?		Eg needs someone to sign or wheelchair access.	
CARE EXPERIENCE AND TRANSITION			
Age (in years) of (first) entry into care			
Age (in years) of transition from care (age out or earlier)			
CURRENT HOUSING SITUATION			
What is your current housing situation?			
Generally adequate and long-term		Where possible code into one of these categories	
Generally OK but only short-term			
Somewhat insecure but adequate			
Housed but unsafe or unstable (eg overcrowded, unaffordable, dilapidated, exposed to abuse)			
No fixed abode – living on the streets			
Notes:			
PREFERENCE FOR INTERVIEW TIME			
Would you prefer to a morning or afternoon interview?			
Are there any times or days you cannot attend?			

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE: INTERVIEW 1

1. INTRODUCE SELF, INTERVIEW AND TIMELINE (ensure ethics processes are covered)
2. QUESTIONS ABOUT CURRENT SITUATION
3. QUESTIONS ABOUT ACCOMMODATION AND ANY EXPERIENCES OF HOMELESSNESS SINCE LEAVING CARE
4. QUESTIONS ABOUT TIME IN CARE

1 INTRODUCE SELF, INTERVIEW AND TIMELINE

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. I will be asking you a number of questions about your experience of housing including times when you may have had trouble finding somewhere to live. First I want to give you a chance to ask me any questions you might have about the project.

[Probe for understanding of Informed consent form. Answer any questions. Secure written consent. Ensure recorder is on.]

We would like to draw a timeline to show your experiences of housing and homelessness, and what you think has assisted you or would have assisted you better.

THE TIMELINE

Simple line on large sheet of paper with markers for LEFT CARE and NOW with 'Where living' on one side of line and 'What was helpful and unhelpful' on the other.

Make two available for each interview to facilitate discussion both post care and in care experiences of accommodation. The Interviewer and the young person can use felt pens to write down details (may write or draw). Place young people's journey as they report it on one side of line and map/ probe for:

- What happened when
- Key transitions
- Their affective orientation to this
- Key supports and sources of resilience (key people, key attachments, key resources)

Place interventions including social service supports on other side of the line

As a way of opening engagement (**map on the timeline**)

- How old the young person is now
- When the young person left care

2. QUESTIONS ABOUT CURRENT SITUATION

Could we could start by you telling me where you are staying at the moment?

*[Probes: **Type of accommodation/ housing/ homelessness?** Own space (e.g. room in house)? Others living there? Homeless?]*

At this point in your life what type of place do you want to live at? What are the specific things you personally would most need for it to be a good place to live?

Functional aspects: Cost; Transport; Proximity to work, education, service supports?

Social aspects: Friends? Family connection? Key support person? Away from certain people? Privacy? Freedom to come and go or have other friends over? Capacity for child to play? Pets?

Emotional aspects: Safety? security and stability? Feeling of connection? Fun.

Who are your key connections now? (Probe for key people and domain categories- family of origin, from time in care, family of destination, school, services)

What does 'home' mean to you?

As a young person who has left care what do you think homelessness is?

IF THE PARTICIPANT IS CURRENTLY LIVING IN A HOUSE, UNIT OR OTHER ACCOMMODATION (not considered to be in primary, secondary or tertiary homeless populations)

How long have you been living in this place? (**Map on timeline**)

How did you find this accommodation?

[Probes re people – friends or workers – and agencies or businesses that might have helped. For each individual or agency clarify HOW they helped – what they did or didn't do that was of benefit. If they did not have help ask how they managed to find a place for themselves (previous knowledge or skills? Interpersonal capacities? Networks / contacts?)]

How much are you paying to stay there? Do you this is a reasonable amount for this accommodation?

What rating would you give your current housing on a scale of 10 is best and 1 is the pits?

What are your main reasons for giving this rating? (Probe for what is it the young person likes and dislikes about their current accommodation)

What would have to happen for your current accommodation to be better (Probe for a point higher on that scale?)

IF THE PARTICIPANT IS CURRENTLY HOMELESS (primary, secondary, tertiary) eg 'LIVING ON THE STREET' / 'COUCH SURFING' / IN SPECIALIST HOMELESSNESS SERVICE ACCOMMODATION

Tell me about where you have been staying How long have you been [*USE PARTICIPANTS WORDS e.g. 'living on the street', 'camped under Jimmy's house', staying at the boarding house*]?

What rating would you give your current living situation on a scale of 10 is best and 1 is the pits?

What are your main reasons for giving this rating? (Probe for what is it the young person likes and dislikes about their current accommodation)

What would have to happen for your current situation to be better (Probe for a point higher on that scale?)

What would be a good place to live?

Tell me about your efforts to find a (better) place to live.

[Probe re each effort – What people – friends or workers – and agencies or businesses might have helped?]

What have you found most helpful in terms of getting help with finding a (better) place to live?

For each individual or agency clarify – What made them you go there? How were they helpful – what did they do that is of benefit. What else could be done – what else could agencies / workers do and also do you think there are things you can do?]

3. QUESTIONS ABOUT ACCOMODATION/ HOUSING/ HOMELESSNESS SINCE LEAVING CARE

Tell what it was like for you leaving care.

I'd like to map the different places you have stayed since leaving care.

What was your housing situation just before you left care? (*Who were you staying with?*)

Can you tell me about the different places you have stayed since leaving care and I'll put them on the timeline? (**Map on timeline**) (Probe for gaps, number of places, types of accommodation/ housing)

I'd like to map any time when you-

- Were homeless
- Didn't think where you were living was adequate
- Were feeling anxious or worried about what was happening for you (**Map all of these on timeline**)

During this time since leaving care who has been most helpful to you in terms of having a good place to stay? (Probe for who, when, how?) (**Map particularly helpful things on timeline**)

[Probe for people – friends or workers – and agencies or businesses that might have helped. For each individual or agency clarify HOW they helped – what they did or didn't do that was of benefit. If they did not have help ask how they managed to find a place for themselves (previous knowledge or skills? Interpersonal capacities? Networks / contacts?)]

Is there anything else that you have found important in helping you have a good place to stay?
(Probe for details)

Is there anything that was quite unhelpful? (Map particularly unhelpful things on timeline)

What other support and connections do you think you would have found helpful since leaving care?
(Map when on timeline) Why?

4. QUESTIONS ABOUT TIME IN CARE

I'd like to now go further back in time to when you were in care. Can you tell me about the kinds of places you have lived over the time you were in care? (Map on timeline)

[Probe to get a sense of the number of moves and quality of relationships – support from case workers and other carers in terms of gaining skill and knowledge to find and maintain accommodation – location and connection since leaving (eg are they now in same area? Do they see foster family?)]

'Did you have a transition from care plan?' (Yes/ No)

Can you tell me what was in that? (Probe for supports leaving care and post care)

What supports and connections before you left care were there about:

- ask about key domains (education, work, accommodation, family engagement)

5. SUGGESTIONS FOR PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING CARE

If you wanted to prevent or stop other young people who are making the transition from being in care from becoming homeless, what do you think should happen?

[Probe re roles and practices - young people, carers, child protection workers, CREATE, other agencies]

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience of making the transition from being?

THANK YOU!

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE: INTERVIEW 2

1. **INTRODUCE SELF**, build rapport
2. **RECAP** YP pathway in care and since leaving care from First interview (JK to prepare summary paragraph for each YP):
 - Housing situation
 - Number of moves
 - Any issues (CP involvement, being evicted)
 - What help and support they received when (make sure this is empirical data about what happened to them)
 - What they think was most helpful in terms of getting and sustaining a stable living situation
3. **CURRENT SITUATION:**
 - Have you remained in the same accommodation since the last interview?
 - Number of times have you moved since the last interview?
What issues have you faced in getting/**securing** stable accommodation since the last interview?

Prompts: relationship issues, financial issues, getting employment, getting a bond loan, help with moving and setting up a new place, rent assistance, tenancy laws and rights/responsibilities, maintaining a rental property, having access to affordable and safe housing which was close to public transport, services, and in safe neighbourhoods. (see also PROMPT LIST below)

 - What issues have you faced in **maintaining** stable accommodation since the last interview? (prompt for when there were some issues that could have led to a problem)
4. **SERVICES:** Can you tell me about any service(s) you have had contact with since we met last?
[Probe in more detail thinking about a broad social determinants of health model e.g. Centrelink, After support service, education providers, health etc- may have gained nb support from any or all of these] See also PROMPT LIST below

MAP, clarify and summarise what these services were about and whether these were useful or not. **Please plot on a timeline for each young person** (a blank sheet of paper)

MAP what accessed, and what helped (or didn't help) when

OTHER SUPPORTS: Can you tell me about any other supports have been critical to you since we last met? Eg friends, family of origin members, foster family, partners, girl/ boy friend? Clarify and summarise what these supports were and whether these were useful or not.

5. **YOUR OPINIONS:** If you could design a service for young care leavers, what would it do?
Prompt: What supports would it include?

6. Service features

- Should this service be delivered by the Department or an NGO service? Y/N Why?
- What age should support to young care leavers be available until? e.g. 19, 21, 23, 25, as long as needed
- What age should leaving care support start from? e.g. 15, 17 years?
- Do you think young people who have left care would be happy to be contacted by a service to see how they are going? If yes are there any things that would be important in how they did this? If not why not? If yes how often should they be contacted?

7. If this service was to engage and successfully support you have a stable living situation what would it need to be like? (Prompt for qualities and principles of practice)

Open ended response

8. *Then ask and record:*

How important are each of the following principles for services to young people who have left care (ask if Very Imp/ Imp/ Not very important)

	Essential	Desirable	Not really important
Provides a service that is easily accessed			
Provides a service that responds to you quickly when you have a problem			
Plans what happens around your specific needs			
Responds to a comprehensive range of areas of your life such as education, training work, relationship difficulties, your emotional and mental health (prompt for list below)			
Helps early when you begin to experience problems that might threaten your accommodation			
A service that is well connected to other agencies			
Has workers that are knowledgeable about resources			
Is culturally relevant to young people from different backgrounds			
Gives you opportunities to give feedback and influence how the service develops			
Has workers that are approachable			
Any others?			

9. Is having the same worker for a period of long period of time important? Y/N

10. How long do think should be the minimum for a worker to stay around who is your key contact? (how many months/ years?)
11. Is there anything else you would like to include that could help prevent homelessness for young people transitioning from care?

PROMPT LIST

Responding to a range of areas of your life such as education, training work, relationship difficulties, your emotional and mental health (prompt for list below)

What type of support(s) should a service provide to young adults who have left care?

- Accessing housing, or accessing and helping to sustain a tenancy
- Accessing public housing, transitional housing, priority on housing waiting lists
- Support to enrol/ stay at education (TAFE/University)
- Support to access employment and training (Job preparation training)
- Support around relationship or parenting issues
- Support to reengage with family of origin
- Support to build belonging in the community (eg church, leisure, friends etc)
- Legal issues
- Access to personal counselling and mental health services
- Access to support for drug & alcohol issues
- Access to life skills training (budgeting, driving)

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE: COMBINED

INTRODUCE SELF: Build rapport

DISCUSS PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET AND SECURE CONSENT

1. CURRENT SITUATION:

- What is your current housing situation?
- Number of times have you moved ?
- What issues have you faced in getting/**securing** stable accommodation?
- Prompts: relationship issues, financial issues, getting employment, getting a bond loan, help with moving and setting up a new place, rent assistance, tenancy laws and rights/responsibilities, maintaining a rental property, having access to affordable and safe housing which was close to public transport, services, and in safe neighbourhoods.

2. What issues have you faced in **maintaining** stable accommodation? (prompt for when there were some issues that could have led to a problem)

3. QUESTIONS ABOUT ACCOMODATION/ HOUSING/ HOMELESSNESS SINCE LEAVING CARE

- Tell what it was like for you leaving care.
- I'd like to you to tell me about the different places you have stayed since leaving care.
- What was your housing situation just before you left care? (*Who were you staying with?*)
- What were your experiences of homelessness? ((primary, secondary, tertiary) eg 'LIVING ON THE STREET' / 'COUCH SURFING' / IN SPECIALIST HOMELESSNESS SERVICE ACCOMMODATION

4. QUESTIONS ABOUT TIME IN CARE

- Can you tell me about the kinds of places you have lived over the time you were in care?
- 'Did you have a transition from care plan?' (Yes/ No)
- Can you tell me what was in that? (Probe for supports leaving care and post care)
- What supports and connections before you left care were there about:
- ask about key domains (education, work, accommodation, family engagement)

5. SERVICES: Can you tell me about any service(s) you have accessed?

- [Probe in more detail thinking about a broad social determinants of health model e.g. Centrelink, After support service, education providers, health etc- may have gained nb support from any or all of these]
- MAP, clarify and summarise what these services were about and whether these were useful or not. **Please plot on a timeline for each young person** (a blank sheet of paper)
- MAP what accessed, and what helped (or didn't help) when.

6. **OTHER SUPPORTS:** Can you tell me about any other supports have been critical to you since we last met? Eg friends, family of origin members, foster family, partners, girl/ boy friend? Clarify and summarise what these supports were and whether these were useful or not.
7. **YOUR OPINIONS:** If you could design a service for young care leavers, what would it do?
Prompt: What supports would it include?
8. Service features
9. Should this service be delivered by the Department or an NGO service? Y/N Why?
10. What age should support to young care leavers be available until? e.g.19, 21, 23, 25, as long as needed
11. What age should leaving care support start from? e.g. 15, 17 years?
12. Do you think young people who have left care would be happy to be contacted by a service to see how they are going? If yes are there any things that would be important in how they did this? If not why not? If yes how often should they be contacted?
13. If this service was to engage and successfully support you have a stable living situation what would it need to be like? (Prompt for qualities and principles of practice) *Open ended response*
14. How important are each of the following principles for services to young people who have left care (ask if Very Imp/ Imp/ Not very important)

	Essential	Desirable	Not really important
• Provides a service that is easily accessed			
• Provides a service that responds to you quickly when you have a problem			
• Plans what happens around your specific needs			
• Responds to a comprehensive range of areas of your life such as education, training work, relationship difficulties, your emotional and mental health			
• Helps early when you begin to experience problems that might threaten your accommodation			
• A service that is well connected to other agencies			
• Has workers that are knowledgeable about resources			
• Is culturally relevant to young people			

from different backgrounds			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gives you opportunities to give feedback and influence how the service develops 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has workers that are approachable 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any others? 			

15. Is having the same worker for a period of long period of time important? Y/N
16. How long do think should be the minimum for a worker to stay around who is your key contact? (how many months/ years?)
17. Is there anything else you would like to include that could help prevent homelessness for young people transitioning from care?

Appendix C: What Helps Prevent Homelessness Chart

What helps prevent homelessness?

Having a safe and secure place to live that is of an OK standard	Being able to relax and do some things you enjoy
Enough education or training	Getting the right support from services
Having work	Being healthy
Good relationships: Having friends and people who care about you (and you them)	Good transition planning
Having enough money to live	Good post care support
Being in a community where you feel accepted	

Appendix D: List of Agencies Participating in Stakeholder groups

In Victoria:

- CREATE (Victoria)
- Peninsula Youth and Family Services
- Berry Street, Shepparton
- East Care Leaving Care Program
- White Lion
- Mackillop Family Services (Residential Program)
- Centre for Multicultural Youth
- Victoria Foundation Services for Trauma
- Centre for Excellence in Child & Family Welfare
- Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)
- Melbourne City Mission (FrontYard)

In Queensland:

- CREATE (Qld)
- Intercept Youth & Family Services
- Career Keys (YHARS service)
- United Synergies
- Brisbane Youth Service
- Uniting Care Community
- Mercy Family Services (Toowoomba)
- Open Minds
- PeakCare
- Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP)