



**TRANSITION TO INDEPENDENCE MONTH
2013**

STANDING ON OUR OWN TWO FEET

Transitioning from care to independence can be both scary and exciting to think about. You might be just starting to think about what transitioning means for you or you could already be out of care and living independently.

This booklet is full of stories about growing up from all kinds of young people who have made the transition from care to independence or currently going through the transition.

In these real life stories there's much to be learned (for both workers and young people) about the challenges and opportunities you can find along the road to adulthood. In these words, along with the frustration and the stress, there's hope and inspiration to be found in how these young people continue to overcome the lifelong affects of trauma and abuse to strive for positive and fulfilling lives as adults. We thank them for showing the courage to stand up and tell their story.

For more information on transitioning to independence contact your Child Safety Officer or call CREATE on 1800 655 105.

Bec, 20 years

Leaving foster care is equally as scary as entering foster care but I was lucky because I had a carer who had given up a successful career to dedicate her life to children who otherwise would not have had the chance to grow into ambitious young adults.

The start: My care journey started when I was 14 years of age. I had been the mother to my three beautiful young sisters since they were born as my mother wasn't able to look after us. When we came into care my sisters and I were separated, I can recall the time, date and name of the worker but more so I can remember the sharp pain I felt in my heart when I was told to give my 12 month old sister to a stranger. The first few weeks into my placement I became depressed, I hadn't heard anything from my sisters and started to think about suicide. School was too much, I had never been to a primary school for longer than six months, so I was really behind with my education and no-one would help me, they seemed to expect that at 14 years of age I would know what four times six is, but I didn't. My carer at the time seemed disinterested that I was losing weight and becoming sick.

The change: After running away several times I was finally moved (after 8 months). I went to a carer; a woman that I didn't know, but who would change my life completely. I am asked what makes a good worker or carer? My answer is someone who can get you to talk; I remember my carer holding me for five hours until I would spill every little detail of my childhood.

Falling back: Going to high school was tough, I fell into depression a few times, thinking I would never make anything of my life. So my carer encouraged me to run. I became sports and school captain and completed a 12 month school exchange in Italy. I have recently completed a Diploma of Justice Administration and have now finished my first semester in Human Services at university with credits. I live independently from my carer now but keep in regular contact.

The future: I love case management, interacting with people and hope to work in the Justice sector. I still have the times where I think – 'What am I doing and where am I going?', but I have an amazing support network of people. I have my health, food on the table and I'm driven to succeed at university.

Tamara, 21 years of age

I think about the broad mix of friends I have. I have friends who were in care like me, friends who come from troubled homes and friends who grew up in supportive, loving homes. Friends from all walks of life.

Some of my friends who were in care were lucky to have great relationships with their foster carers. I count myself as a very lucky one. When I was 18, I moved out into a share house. But I still got on the phone to my foster mum when I was feeling down, when TAFE was getting a bit much, or when I had an argument with a housemate about whose turn it was to do the dishes.

I also got on the phone a few months after I got my first credit card, because I was young and silly and it was free money...you can imagine right? Well my foster mum helped me out then too.

When I needed to know how to empty a vacuum cleaner bag...

When I had to do my tax for the first time...

When I was nervous about going for my first "real" job interview.

My foster mum was there.

Just because I was in foster care, didn't mean I turned into a sensible, street smart adult on my 18th birthday. It took time for me. Just like any other kid, fostered or not.

I look at my friends who have grown up with their biological parents and for the most part, they lived with mum and dad from anywhere from 20 to 27. They went through all the fun and crazy stages I did. And they knew they could count on their parents if they messed up. Or even if they just didn't know the rules yet. Mum and Dad were there.

I was so lucky that my foster mum was there for me even after I turned 18.

Gerry, 21 years

I was placed into care due to the harsh severity of my previous living arrangements and because my safety was at risk, I was immediately placed into a foster care. I was one of the many fortunate kids who have received an overwhelming amount of support during my time in care: from carers to workers, to teachers and other staff from the Department.

I spent my early childhood living on the road, so I missed out on many years of school and had a lot of catching up to do. My transition from care plan revolved around what I would become when I left care. We started planning early, which I think made a big difference.

I gathered a further understanding of the care system due to my exposure to organisations such as the CREATE Foundation and my ongoing volunteer work there in advocating for young people. I think it's really important for young people to be informed about their rights and how they can be involved in major life decisions.

I believe a combination of positive communication, effective relationships and an open mindset towards the whole 'care system' made me understand why the government do things and how it is trying to ensure our safety. My education support plan was continuously being revised to ensure it was being tailored to my current passions. At the beginning it was all about the creative arts, cartooning, enrolling in arts classes etc... but was slowly found myself wanting to do human service work. I had ongoing meetings with my worker and foster carer about what would happen after I turned 18 and I was involved in the whole process. This tight connection and strong communication led to me having a transition from care that worked and all the important people were involved.

The possibility of me finishing school and being eligible to receive an OP was also discussed. Thanks to the stable experience I had of high school i.e. just one school, living with one supportive carer, I was able to catch up and receive an OP. I am now currently enrolled as a full time student at USC studying a Bachelor of Social work.

I have mentors that I met through my years of being a foster child. I knew many staff members in my local department which I believed help build my confidence in the government as a whole. I guess that feeling that there ARE people out there willing to help, and in return I wanted to help.

I currently have casual employment as a residential disability care support worker, I'm a young producer for an organization called Human Ventures (ensuring I continue my creative passions) and a member of the CREATE Foundation crew.

The combination of many different factors meant that I had a successful transition from care.

Sam, 23 years

The lead up to transitioning from care was a really overwhelming experience for me and for the professionals involved in my life. But having had concrete plans, realistic expectations and a commitment from my workers, turning 18 ended up being a really fun time.

I came into care when I was 12 and had very limited positive contact with my family. The Department became my main source of support, encouragement and filled the role of my family. My worker started talking to me about my goals and dreams for my future when I was around 15. It wasn't anything formal, she just asked questions about what I was interested in doing, I was dead set determined to be a youth worker and eventually go to uni and study social work so that one day I too could become a Child Safety Officer (CSO). Knowing what I wanted to do as an occupation helped steer what support and resources I needed from the Department in order to achieve my goals.

I didn't start transitioning from care until 6 months prior to me leaving care. I had many conversations with my worker about things that I thought may help me through the process, and was given support in trying new things – such as going grocery shopping and having control of the budget and what food was bought with the support of a youth worker there to guide me. The first couple of times were disastrous, but we brought it down to a learning opportunity, eventually managing to buy enough food and fit within my budget.

Having had 46 placements I didn't have many stable friendships and as much as I loved being at school, the issues happening in my life made it hard for me to concentrate on my studies, especially with the amount of school time I was missing. I decided to leave school and look for a job. After a couple of months working full time and having a placement change that could be long term if I chose it, I decided that working full time was not fulfilling and wouldn't lead me to where I really wanted to be, so I decided to look into going back to study. I decided to go to TAFE and study Youth Work and Juvenile Justice. Whilst at TAFE I developed real relationships with people who would be around after I turned 18, this was probably the best thing that happened and the Department really encouraged my new friendships, and supported me in maintaining them. I had always had very good relationships with the professionals in my life, but never with people my own age or who weren't connected to the system in some way. My new friends were over 18, but the Department didn't deter me away from them because of the age difference, they saw the shift in support from professional relationships to personal ones as something to hold onto and created opportunities for me to spend time with my friends alone without youth workers.

When I was 17, I was living in a residential and working one on one with a youth worker so I was able to reduce hours of support slowly. Having been in the system for so long, it was very rare for me to ever have a night without a carer or somebody there with me, so the idea of spending nights by myself really frightened me. But having had time to prepare myself and come up with a plan if I did find it to frightening helped ease the anxiety and fear. A couple of things that helped me most throughout my transitioning was the support I received around the choices and direction I wanted my life to take.

Everyone had different views on what they thought I should be doing, or what path I should take, but they allowed me to take control and to decide for myself what I wanted to do. Throughout the planning stage I was 100% involved. I had monthly case planning meetings, and spoke to my CSO regularly about my expectations of her, and her of me. We printed out a calendar of the 6 months leading up to my 18th and worked out day and night shifts that I would be without youth worker support. We scheduled meetings and wrote them in along with deadlines for when I needed to have quotes for furniture and other things I needed from the Department back to her, or when she or I would need to have had something organised.

In the final months leading up to me turning 18, the financial aspect (buying household goods paying for things relating to studying and just the formal approval process) started to stress everyone out. The Team Leader objected to things my CSO had already verbally approved which then made my CSO have to take back things she had organised. My CSO was unsure of the budget surrounding TFC and believed that everything she was approving I was entitled to. The plans started to unravel, and with only weeks left before I transitioned from care, youth workers had to be present 24 hours as I was experiencing significant emotional and physical stress. Things were going backwards very quickly so my CSO went out on a limb along with the Team Leader and youth workers of the residential and spoke to the Senior Practitioner about the situation. The Senior Practitioner overrode the decisions made by the Team Leader and things went back to how it had been planned.

Emotionally I was fragile, and the changes to the plans really threw me, the Senior Practitioner organised for me to have contact with a support worker weekly after turning 18 for up to 6 months just to make sure things were on track. After about a month of leaving care I felt confident enough that I could look after myself without the involvement of the Department and the support stopped.

I felt listened to by my workers and having had the opportunities to control some of the changes around support and how much/little I wanted I felt empowered, confident and capable of surviving the transition from care. The planning stage never ended, we constantly re-evaluated things and looked at better ways to make things happen. The commitment and patience from my youth workers, but especially my CSO, were vital to a positive transition and I am so grateful that my CSO was able to advocate on behalf of me and have the decisions that weren't in my best interest turned around. Having everything written down and planned out, and commitment to that plan helped more than anything. Knowing what the next challenge was going to be gave me time to prepare myself – I never felt as though something was sprung on me. Overall, the Department did a really good thing for me and I am incredibly grateful.





Ayesha, 19 years

I love watching cartoons and doing arts and crafts. I transitioned from care in May 2012 and became involved with CREATE a few years ago back when I lived in a residential and I was asked if I wanted to do Young Consultants Training, I took this opportunity and did it. As a Young Consultant with CREATE I've received so much experience from doing speakers events, Child Safety Officer Training, Connection Events and Youth Advisory Group Meetings.

I entered care at the age of 14 and my care experience has had a lot of ups and downs. At first I was a really negative person, just a kid with too many things going on and to me the Department were controlling and I didn't want to engage. I hated moving around, almost every placement I had broke down, due to me or others. But really I was too angry to care about what the Department had to say or where they would move me to next. I just didn't want to work with them; I didn't want them in my life.

There was definitely a lack of participation from my side in communicating with the department. I never had anything nice to say if I was to say anything at all in my case plan meetings. Eventually all meetings became unproductive and I just stopped going. I've had mental health issues prior to my care experience but when I entered care they escalated. I was a ticking bomb of rage. People would push my buttons and I would go off on a rampage. Not one of finest periods in life. I felt that many of my workers didn't always have a lot of patience with me. I felt at times that I was given a label as a trouble maker. I felt when I went to the department that everyone knew about my behaviour. Everyone would comment that I needed to get my stuff together, but no one ever really gave me suggestions or help in where to start in doing that.

Since there was a lack of communication from both the department and myself TFC was never really discussed. I went to a Youth Advisory Group Meeting at CREATE when I was 16 and it was there that I was told about TFC and what it was. Hearing that I was going to be leaving care in a less than two years scared me. I kept thinking; who was going to look after me, where was I going to live and how was I going to cope? I had all these issues and everything just became so big. It wasn't until my 17th birthday that I had a realization, that this was my last year in care, the last year of being a child safety kid and then I had another thought. Where was I going to go?

My CSO went on maternity leave so she was replaced by another CSO, a lovely British Lady. It was a new clean slate to start building a relationship with the Department. While this beautiful new relationship started to build, my placement at a residential broke down and I went on to self place at my friends. My education before I came into care wasn't so good. I was barely attending full days, wore the wrong uniform on the wrong days and was talking back to teachers and staff. My second year in care I just dropped out of school, it was something I wasn't interested in doing and I refused to go back to mainstream education. But when I self placed I decided to attend a Flexi School to help me get back in to the routine of studying.

While I was living in my friends unit my CSO introduced me to a service that could help me with housing. They did outreach with me until my “friend” threatened to kick me out and I was at risk of homelessness. The service then moved me in to one of their semi-independent living houses where I lived alone for 7 months. Along this path I somehow managed to control my anger which helped me keep the placement for that long and maintain a healthy relationship with people who care for me like my key workers and my CSO.

While living independently I have learnt a lot of common sense and quite a few living skills, sometimes I just needed help with the basic things like how to change a light bulb and how to make an appointment.

When I started to work with the Department I started to receive a lot more from them, like my amazing bed and my computer. I’ve never really owned anything nice before so I’m extremely thankful for the department in giving me these items.

I think the major issues facing children and young people in care are placement stability, finding support networks, financial support for clothing, extracurricular activities etc, getting permission to do things which can sometimes take months, more personalised mental health support during and after care and TFC (you need more support during and after the TFC process). I don’t really know what I’m doing, or where I’m going. I think I’m still trying to find my feet and to reflect on what the past 18 years has been. I want the future child protection system to be a place where all children and young people have homes, are fed, are loved and cared for. For now, I just want to see what the world has...I want to see if I can do transitioning from care to independence successfully.

So finally to sum up, here’s my hot tips for becoming independent;

- You have to have a good support network in place like family, friends, and organisations. My GP has been the best support.
- Young people need to have a plan B – just in case plan A doesn’t go through. Like your housing falls through and you don’t need to freak out because you’ve got a Plan B.
- It’s good to have a daily activity to do like school, work etc.
- Having your own boundaries. Like if you’re living independently knowing that you can go out late some nights, but you’re the one responsible if you sleep in the next morning and don’t go to work.
- Learn how to budget.
- Learn how to cook and clean – I watch people when they do it, and if I ever get stuck I go to Google.
- Make sure you have your Medicare card, bank card, health care card, birth certificate. It helps to prove who you are and if you have it then you won’t get into trouble for not having it.
- You need to start learning about transition from care and asking questions early. You need to start getting prepared at 15. I wish my worker had spoken to me earlier.
- Make sure you’re prepared and don’t freak out. If you have a plan A and B and supports you should be okay. It’ll be scary to start with, but it does get easier. Remember to talk to your friends and not keep all your emotions in.
- Access counselling before you leave care. You need someone you’re comfortable with and can get in contact with easy.
- When you’re looking at what you want/need for your transition from care package you should get some basic stuff as well like a cookbook, appliances, washing machine, driving lessons, a TAFE course – everything that you need as an essential.

Shelley, 22 years

I went into care when I was 12. I've had 2 carers. The first one I didn't stay with very long but my second one I stayed with for a very long time. She was very good. I've had about five CSO's. They didn't really do much for me though.

I would have liked for my CSO's to have come and visited me more. I only saw my CSO's once a year. I also would have liked for my CSO's to have told me more about what services are available. They gave me my TFC money which was good. I used this to get furniture and stuff.

To me, a great CSO is someone who visits the young person regularly. Someone who tells the young person about services that they can access. It's important that CSO's explain things really clearly so that they young person can understand them. CSO's shouldn't just rock up all cranky even if the child has been misbehaving because this can have a bad impact on their relationship.

My transition from care was really rushed which was not good. I don't remember there being any planning. I got to stay with my carer past 18 which was really good. When I decided that I wanted to live by myself I had to put myself into homelessness to get accommodation. I'm still in that accommodation today. My transition from care would have been easier if planning had started early. I would have also liked to have known more about the services that I could access.

Angela , 22 years

I would like to start by thanking you for taking the time to read this. I have been involved with CREATE foundation for four years, during this time I have had many fun, exciting and challenging things to do, but I have loved every minute of it, but this is not about me, it is about transitioning to independence. During my four years I have come across many lovely young people who face many daily challenges because they did not have a proper leaving care plan, many did not even know one existed. I don't think that is good thing, how much easier would things be for someone had they been provided with the simple items that transitioning can get you, stuff like

- A Bed
- White goods
- Furniture
- Somewhere to live

If more young people had this given to them when the time came to leave care, imagine how much better their lives would have and could have been!

Transitioning does not have to be hard, it takes a lot of work to make sure the young person is ready and has everything they need but the earlier you start the better it will be.

Amanda, 22 years

I had a really positive experience in Kinship care with my aunty as my guardian. I still keep in contact with her and she is a great support person. Although I have had a positive experience in the system, I think that the constant changing of CSO's is a major problem for many young people and children.

My transition was a smooth one, I had a great CSO who helped me start my transition at 17 years old and I wasn't rushed to "get kicked out of the system". The biggest piece of advice I can give to someone is to make sure you have a transition from care plan and support services in place.

I have just had a baby boy and am currently on maternity leave. I work for Boys Town as an Administration Assistant. I started a traineeship when I was in high school – this qualification was useful once I had transition to independent living. I was made aware of this traineeship through my school, and strongly encourage young people in care to think about future goals and ambitions prior to transitioning. My main goal for the future is to be a good mother by living a healthy lifestyle.

Chris, 25 years

I was in care through the department since I was 3 years old and placed with a few foster families all over Brisbane and Ipswich. I have an intellectual disability and I am now 25 years old. It wasn't always easy in care, when I was younger I use to hurt people all over the place like in schools and also in public.

It's really hard to explain about how a person feels about being in care. It feels a bit uncertain being in care, like you don't know where you are going. Transitioning to independence was a bit hard at first, it was hard to understand when I was 15 and was living in Inala at a residential I didn't really think about the future. When I was 16 I started to get excited about turning 18 and having more freedom. Even though I have the Adult Guardian now I still have more freedom than I did when I was 16. I was never really worried about where I would live after I turned 18, I kind of knew I would have help to get the basics of being an adult right.

Though I'm 25 now I'm still learning to be an adult – still getting the basics right – I'm still learning how to get along with people, how to work with people, but my housework skills are getting better! Sometimes with growing up and being out of care I have felt lonely. When I feel like this, I just talk to people; people on the street, people at church, people from my old school. One thing that also helped was I started writing poetry from the age of 17, it keeps me motivated!

My advice to other young people leaving care is it's really important to have someone by your side to work with you and give you a hand when you need it, or when you are feeling down.

Skye, 23 years

My care experience was a positive one up until I turned 14 years old. I had been living with the same carer from the age of 2. Just after I had turned 14 I was placed into a youth shelter. When I was in the shelter the Department was not involved in my life anymore, and I felt alone. I contacted the Children's Commission who helped me out.

I still keep in contact with my foster parents because they look after my sister. I tried to relocate my natural birth parents when I had transitioned but when I confronted the Department with this request I was ignored. I blame myself in a lot of ways for my transition being disorganised. I look back on it now and think that I should have listened to my Child Safety Officer more. My advice is to communicate with everyone, so everyone is on the same page and knows what the young person wants. Currently I am struggling to find housing and lacking motivation to go back and finish high school. However, I feel mentally I am in a much better place than I was five years ago.

Jordy, 19 years

Change comes in many forms. Change is one us foster kids past and present face on a constant basis. This change shakes us and creates an unstable life for many of us. The way that one looks at change has a massive affect on the outcome.

Changing foster placements or residential is of course a very rough change, but if you look at it with a positive attitude I believe it will help in fitting in and starting your new life. My foster care adventure is somewhat over but will always be a part of me. I get to make all my own decisions now. And I have learnt that some decisions are better than others and some will be the most amazing decisions you could ever make.

As I am writing this I am sitting in a cafe in the Indian Himalayas watching the world slowly go past, remembering the days that I would cry and get upset over change. Don't get me wrong, moving countries to live in India for 5 months is a massive change that yes I decided myself and in the beginning regretted hugely. But here I am finally feeling content with life and reflecting on my adventure through foster care with a thankful attitude to everyone that has impacted on my life. It probably feels like a long way off for many of you but just stay positive and think of every moment as something that is going to shape you into an amazing person that one day if you set your mind to it: you could be sitting in the Himalayas writing about the fact that anything is possible if you can just try and find that right attitude about change.

Normal life as an Aussie girl that went through foster care is crazy enough, but when you throw that girl into a totally different country, which has different rules, beliefs and food you get an interesting outcome. My name is Jordanah and I am 19. I was in foster care for 13 years and transitioned from care last year. I have spent the last four and a half months in India, on a gap year teaching kids! I had so many crazy experiences in India that if I wrote them all everyone would get bored so I'll give you one of my favourites.

I lived in the north of India in a town called Kullu. Kullu is in one of the many valleys in the Himalayas. One day I had the opportunity to go on an eight-hour drive to Dharamshala, this is where the current Dala Lama lives. My volunteer partner Amelia and I said yes straight away. This place was much higher in altitude than everywhere else we had been. One day our guide asked us if we wanted to go for a walk. We said sure why not it was a lovely day. And without going into all the small details let's just say during this "walk" we battled rain, hail and snow. Let's also say this "walk" was deemed by ourselves as not just a "walk" but a nine hour hike up some crazy high Himalayan mountains. I wasn't all that physically fit so most of the time I had to be dragged up.

That day really taught me a lot that I didn't realize while trekking in my Connies. You have to fight damn hard to find your happiness in life. To let go of all the stress that life puts you through and see the beautiful world that we live in. So just remember that every crap day is just yet another step to that amazing happy moment that happens after fighting so hard for what you want.



For more information on transitioning to independence contact your
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