



Preventing homelessness among out-of-home care leavers

Yfoundations position paper

The issue

Young people in out-of-home care (OOHC) are expected to become independent by the time they turn 18. While the transition to adulthood can be difficult for any young person, it's especially challenging for this extremely vulnerable group. Young people in OOHC have experienced abuse or neglect prior to entering care, and also suffered the trauma of being removed from their families.

These experiences mean that OOHC leavers are at particular risk of adverse outcomes. Compared to the average population, they are more likely to disengage from education and employment, come into contact with the criminal justice system and suffer from mental and physical health issues. These problems are both the cause and consequence of high rates of housing instability and homelessness among young people leaving OOHC.

Expecting vulnerable OOHC leavers to become independent at 18 is not only unrealistic, but it's also out of step with community norms. Australian youth are living at home longer due to the rising costs of education and rent. Young people in OOHC usually don't have the same safety net as their peers and require greater support to develop independent living skills and pay for accommodation.

The NSW Government has made efforts to prevent homelessness among young people leaving OOHC in the past decade. In 2017, they established the Premier's Youth Initiative (PYI). Community housing providers support OOHC leavers to access the private market through [head-leasing](#), and by providing a personal advisor and mentoring on education and employment. The NSW Government has also invested in Foyer Central, which provides supported accommodation for OOHC leavers who are ready to engage in education and training.

While Yfoundations commends these efforts, much more needs to be done to support young people across the state to transition from OOHC.



[Read our PYI factsheet](#)

Our asks

The NSW Government must raise the age of OOHC placements to 21.

Yfoundations joins the [Home Stretch Campaign](#) in calling on the NSW Government to allow young people to remain in OOHC until they are at least 21, regardless of their placement type. This will give those vulnerable young people who are in stable placements more time to acquire the skills and confidence they need to live independently.

The NSW Government must commit ongoing funding to the PYI program beyond 2024 and expand it across the state.

[Research from the UK](#) suggests that extending OOHC, while important, is more likely to benefit those in stable placements. Meanwhile, [a three-year evaluation](#) of NSW's PYI found that this program reduced homelessness among the most vulnerable OOHC leavers – those who had a history of using homelessness services while in care. The NSW government has committed to funding this program until 2024. Given the benefits the PYI offers to those who are most at risk of homelessness, it's essential that the NSW Government commit to ongoing funding, past 2024, and expand the program across the state.

The NSW Government must improve transition planning for young people leaving OOHC.

Transitional planning that includes mentoring and wrap-around support, such as the Victorian [Stand By Me Program](#), has been found to improve OOHC leavers pathways into stable housing. Currently, the NSW Government monitors how many OOHC leavers have transition plans, but not the quality of these plans and whether or not they are actually implemented. Yfoundations supports the recommendations of the PYI evaluation, which found that this program cannot be effective unless OOHC leavers receive sufficient transition support from OOHC providers.

The NSW Government must increase supported accommodation options for young people.

The PYI evaluation also found that there was a subsection of OOHC leavers who do not want to stay in care but were not ready to live independently, even with the support of advisors and mentors. This cohort required a 'stepping-stone' approach. An option would be for additional supported accommodation.

The NSW Government must expand Foyers for young people leaving OOHC, pending the results of the Foyer Central evaluation.

[A 2017 review](#) commissioned by the NSW Government found that there was insufficient evidence to recommend Foyers as an option for OOHC leavers. Since then, Foyer Central has opened its doors, and KPMG is monitoring its success with this cohort. If the results of this evaluation are positive, the NSW Government should consider scaling up the program.

The NSW Government must increase housing for young people with complex needs.

Some OOHC leavers, such as young people with disabilities, require more nuanced and specialised support than PYI or Foyers can offer.



[See our housing for young people with complex needs position paper](#)

The evidence

As of 30 June 2020, there were around 46,000 children in out-of-home care across Australia, 16,160 of which were in NSW.

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[CREATE's recent national survey of care leavers](#) showed that 30% of participants were homeless at some stage within their first year of leaving OOHC. And of those who experienced homelessness, 37% were homeless for more than six months.



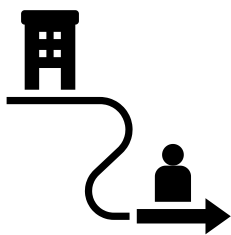
An [AHURI study](#) found that more than half its 1,848 respondents in Victoria accessed homelessness services in the four years after leaving OOHC, while one in three had multiple homeless experiences.

[Deloitte's 2018 cost-benefit analysis](#) found that raising the age in NSW would lead to less teen pregnancy, more educational engagement, less hospitalisation and provide a net saving to the NSW Government. It also reduces the risk of young people becoming homeless by approximately 19.5%, as care leavers would have more time to build support networks, access employment and secure independent housing.



A [study in the US](#) found that each additional year in extended foster care decreased the likelihood of young people, aged between 17 and 21, experiencing homelessness by about 28%. It also decreased the number of times young people became homeless and the number of days they were homeless during that period.

An evaluation of the [Staying Put Trial in the UK](#), a program that offered young people the opportunity to remain with their carers until they reach the age of 21, showed great education and social outcomes among its participants.



[Evidence suggests](#) that many young people leaving care did not receive the support they needed. CREATE found that only 24.4% of young people they surveyed aged 15-18 knew of their leaving care plan.

[CREATE](#) also found that in planning for leaving care, almost half of the respondents (n=325) had spoken with their caseworker, although 26% reported that they had not spoken with anyone. Only 36% indicated that they had a transition plan, and 39% of these had been quite involved in its preparation.

36%

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The PYI evaluation found that 30% of young people in PYI did not have a leaving care plan when they started the program.