



## **Which Way Home Australian Government Green Paper on Homelessness: Response by the CREATE Foundation**

### **Introduction**

CREATE Foundation (CREATE) is the only national peak organisation working directly with and, through policy, research and advocacy work, for children and young people in care and those who have recently left care up to the age of 25 years.

The CREATE ethos is to:

- **Connect** children and young people to each other
- **Empower** and resource children and young people in care
- **Change** the care system from the inside out through the participation of children and young people

### **Coordinated and integrated strategies**

CREATE is actively engaged with the National Child Protection Framework development process. The Homelessness White Papers needs to be well integrated with the other Federal initiatives including the National Child Protection Framework, Early Childhood Agenda, Affordable Housing Strategy, Domestic/Family Violence Strategy and broader health and disability program initiatives. It also needs high level endorsement from the Prime Ministers Office and Cabinet and the Council of Australian Governments.

### **Endorsement of submissions**

CREATE endorses the submissions of the peak organisations Homelessness Australia and the National Youth Coalition for Housing. Those organisations are more closely

engaged in housing and homelessness services than CREATE and therefore are in a better position to provide detailed feedback to the Green Paper.

Our brief submission will not aim to cover the details of those proposals. Our key point is that the issues confronting children and young people in transition from care and after care be attended to in the White Paper on Homelessness.

### **CREATE's response to Green paper**

An additional target for reducing homelessness could be included in the White Paper:

A decrease in the number of young people who become homeless on leaving care or who have to access homelessness services within 2 years of leaving care.

More positively stated the target could be to:

Increase the proportion of young people who have left care who are able to secure and maintain safe, permanent and affordable housing.

This target can only be achieved by improved action:

- to provide models of care up to age 18 for all young people in care that meet their needs and adequately support them and help prepare them for independence
- to provide affordable, subsidised transition to independence/semi-supported accommodation for those discharged from care, available up to they reach the age of 25.
- to provide young people who have left care priority access to long term public and/or community housing.

In response to the Options in the Green Paper, we support the improvement and strengthening of SAAP, rather than its disaggregation and realignment under different portfolios. Common approaches to data collection, funding, case management etc in the single SAAP program are important elements. However we also recognise that different target groups have particular needs and requires distinct approaches.

Many shortcomings in the SAAP program are attributable to inadequate funding in the face of overwhelming demand. These need to be addressed both through prevention and early intervention measures to reduce demand and increased funding to allow for quality services to better meet demand.

I include below an extract from the CREATE response to the National Child Protection Framework Discussion Paper, as these sections are relevant to housing and homelessness issues.

The CREATE Report Card: Transitioning from Care (McDowell, J. for the CREATE Foundation, 2008) highlights the inconsistencies and inadequacies in current arrangements for leaving care planning and transitioning and after care support. In summary:

- Some jurisdictions do not yet make explicit requirement for the age at which leaving care planning should commence, nor how it should occur, and make little or no provision for support beyond the date of discharge from care.
- Most jurisdictions make some commitments to leaving care planning and post care support in policy guidance
- The experience of many young people indicates that practice falls short of legal and policy requirements.

It is widely accepted that most young adults brought up in their own families need a high level of support well into their adult years. Where the State is the ‘parent’, it is morally if not legally obligated to provide that support as long as it is needed, to make the transition to independence as positive as possible. The required support may vary in intensity over a number of years and may not follow a predictable path. The experiences of the young people before and during care will impact on how much on-going support is required.

Without sufficient support, research shows poor outcomes including criminal involvement, homelessness, physical and mental illness, unemployment and early

and often inadequately supported parenting, all of which can perpetuate cycles of disadvantage and involvement of another generation in the child protection system.

The underpinnings of CREATE's call for reform in this area are:

- consistency in legislation
- improved planning for leaving care from aged 15 and
- better delivery of support services to care leavers at the state/territory level.

Further, some particular initiatives with a housing / homelessness prevention focus that CREATE proposed for inclusion in the National Child Protection Framework are:

- *Enhanced Opportunities for Care Leavers: Making a Home:* An increase in the funding available for the Transition to Independent Living Scheme (TILA) to \$5,000 per young person and better promotion of the scheme to ensure it is taken up. CREATE acknowledges that *primary* responsibility for transition financial support should come from state and territory governments, however current provisions are inadequate in all jurisdictions. There is also considerable gate-keeping making access to financial support both the state/territories and TILA difficult. Some level of independent living establishment support should be seen as an entitlement, available solely on the basis of a person having been in statutory care or formal kin care. Federal government investment will assist these young people to have a positive start to adult life and will redress inequities across the nation. Jurisdictions which match or exceed Federal government financial support could be rewarded through additional funding. Support for young care leavers to maintain stable accommodation is also urgently needed, through payment of increased rent assistance for, say, the first two years after establishing a home. State and territory housing authorities also need to improve the access of young people to public housing and non-government housing organisations have

a role to play in increasing the community housing options suitable to care leavers aged 18-25.

- A number of programs open to all young people, and often used by young people in care and leaving care already funded by the Federal government should be expanded. These include the well regarded but under-funded Reconnect and JPET programs – both programs need investment over 10 years to double or treble their size to better meet demand and address access inequities. JPET should be administered by the Department of FaHCSIA, in recognition of its community services origins and role.
- Homelessness program: While we do not want to see care leavers living in homelessness persons' services, many of them do access SAAP. SAAP provides emergency and medium to long term semi-independent living models and outreach support, as well as case management to care leavers among others. For those disconnected from out-of-home care system support, they may prove a lifeline. The White Paper on Homelessness and its associated strategy must pay particular attention to preventing care leavers becoming homeless. As well, additional funding is needed for youth SAAP services. We also understand the IHSY Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth is providing valuable services, but is hampered by insecure, temporary and insufficient funding.

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