

Archibald's story¹

Archibald is in his early 20's. During his time in out-of-home care, he had a number of foster care placements and lived in residential care. Since leaving care, he has been transient between family and friends. Archibald is a proud young Aboriginal man.

Archibald provided a timeline of important events in his life and told us about his experiences and views. This information is presented below in Archibald's own words as much as possible. To protect his privacy, some identifying information has been removed.

Timeline

Age 14 (or just before)	Placed into care – initially moved around a number of foster placements (4-5 placements)
Age 14	Then moved into resi (residential care) and split from siblings
Age 15	Moved into resi unit
Age 16	First discussion with resi staff about leaving care and what would happen
Age 18	Transitional program applied for and entered
Age 18	Exited transitional program due to conflict
From age of 18 to present	Has been transient between a relative and friends

Discussion with the Commission

When was the first time someone talked to you about leaving care and your plans after you turn 18?

Been talking about it ever since I went in, which was when I was turning 14.

It was always initiated by me cos I didn't like it, I wanted to get the fuck out of there...

When did you first talk officially about plans for leaving care?

When I was about 16 or so, one of the unit workers talked to me about it. They sat me down and wanted me to go lead tenant... I didn't want to. They said that's how it worked.

Then what happened?

I was like nah I'm not doin that I'm not going, you gonna have to keep me here and other people can fucken go, it's a waste of time spending a year there then packing up again and fucking off.

Is that what happened?

This is what happens to people, they [DHHS] get ya when you're about 17 years old, put ya in lead tenant. They sell it like you get more leeway or whatever, then in a year's time they

¹ 'Archibald' is a pseudonym chosen by the young person to protect their privacy.

fucken pack ya up again and say goodbye.. It's fucked. It happens to pretty much everyone [in resi].

I ended up staying at the unit, I didn't wanna pack my shit just to do it all over again... So I stayed until around my 18th birthday... I said very loud and clear that I didn't want to move to lead tenant then have to move again in 6 months or a year...

Then?

The way it worked out – I made the decision I wanted to stay in the unit. At that point I was already looking at places I wanted to go to move out. One place was like uni [University/TAFE]... like that youth foyer place. We went and looked at it and talked to people and it was like 'this is sick', but I didn't want to do uni or TAFE – which they said you have to do to stay there. I wanted to earn money, work and fend for myself... I never wanted to ever be on Centrelink. I was the only one not getting it [Centrelink] out of other kids. I was like, nah I don't wanna be a little shit... I want to work my own way so always refused it until a bit later on in my teens.

Then I found a program that an organisation was running – like a transitional program [name withheld]. I was like, that's what I wanna do. We set it up, I got approved for the rental property [like a shared rental property with other young people from similar circumstances]. Then just before turning 18 I moved straight into the place, but maybe about a month before that we did some shopping for the furniture and shit like that. Then from there got kicked out...

What was that like?

It was alright, I was still doin school there, at [Flexible learning centre]. All that doing my thing, I kept going to school even when I got kicked out... finished some courses etc... But [Springboard worker] was the only worker that I wanted to see...

Why was that?

She's the one who supports me to get into all the shit I'm interested in, helps me with talking about these things, and then getting me involved and supporting me continuing in them... She's the only persistent and consistent worker that I've had. Even in [the transitional program] they'd just go check the house every couple of weeks, ask how you are and that's that. Wouldn't even know us. Then they did a dinner night.

I was in [the transitional program] for just under a year before they kicked me out.

Then what?

Just been cruising around myself since.

They have any contact after?

Only to like release my information and all that shit after...

Were they clear around why you got kicked out?

Pretty much give you no option. It's just the same old thing where you are left with really no option and then it's like see ya later. Imagine in a family situation, at least ya mum would sit there and listen to you. But that's the thing, in care and in that place no one does, no one cares.

I worked so hard to do shit and get a place for all this time, then the one little thing happens and I didn't even get a chance to talk about.

So what's happened over the past year?

[Springboard worker] is the only one who has supported me, cared to listen or be there... I found my own way to connect with relatives, which has been a bit of support for me. Other than that, I just move around, pretty much mates' houses. I can stay there [with a relative] sometimes but not often, so I find my way around place to place.

I was in that place [transitional program] to find myself my own rental property... I was working my ass off, got a job, was still at school, and looking for a rental property. I coulda gone down a totally different path but I chose this one... I've come so far, if I was gonna be a bad cunt I could have been and I was on that way and in that crowd... and people clearly think automatically that I am that bad cunt clearly. I think it's the same with heaps of kids who've been in resi. It's like, 'na fuck they are dodgy cunts'.

From the time I was 13 to 18, I went through so much shit, going into care and living in resi, getting caught up in all this shit that happens to most kids who are in resi... Then at the end I was dropped off [no longer supported] because of something that happened that I disagreed with... It's like, what the fuck, I worked so hard to get through all that shit. All of that out the window, imagine what coulda happened, where I could be...

I don't want to be involved in any handout shit. I am working hard on myself now and I have one support in [Springboard worker].

What is it about them [Springboard worker] that makes you trust her and want to remain engaged with her?

She's just a good person. She gives me the time, treats me like a person, listens to me. None of that fake bullshit that most workers do.

Any examples of other friends or people you know who have had a good experience leaving care into stable accommodation?

Not really, they are all the same in pretty shit situations. An example of one – my mate right now, he was in resi with me. He's couch surfing, has no place to live. He's worse off than me.

He went to lead tenant, then he ended up getting put with a person who wasn't even involved in his life just cos there was literally nowhere for him... He's on Centrelink but can't get payments till he has an address. He has a record so can't get a job [has spent time in Youth Justice Custody]. He has no options... He's got nothing and this is what happens to so many of the kids in resi. That would have been me bro but worse, I woulda been in [another state where family is located] fighting people and shit. The only reason it's not is because of the shit that I do, I worked hard and I learn from experiences...

What about the ideal scenario leaving care, what would it look like?

There is no ideal scenario really.

The best thing I've seen happen was a nine-year-old came through came into resi, got moved to another place – he recently just went back with his immediate family. That is the best thing that could happen. But he still came in to resi with no [criminal] record, leaves with

a record and he's only like 14 or 15 now. But the only way he can survive or get out of that world is to be out of resi. But he's learnt heaps now, he learnt how to steal a car, he learnt the ropes because he came there in the first place. The only positive thing is that he's now out....

So basically, keep kids out of resi in the first place... help the parents. Kids who have kids, in the same space that I could have been in... There are always more family options or other option, like I had family I'm sure they could have linked me and my siblings with, but instead we were split and I went to resi.

Did you ever have Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making² meeting or anything similar?

Na never heard of that.

[When in residential care] I gave them details of all our family in [another state]. They spoke to an aunty and shit, they met [one or two of them]... But they still didn't put my siblings there. At that point I probably wouldn't have gone to [interstate] anyway, cos I had started to get things going here, but they didn't even consider it for my siblings...

I can tell you, the last year since getting out of that place [transitional program] I've done more shit than the whole time I was in. More positive shit. I've got offers to go and be a mentor for other kids who have grown up in situations like me, which I will do... [A program], they want me to be a worker there – to mentor the young people coming through.

Basically, I have more opportunities now that I'm not involved in any of that shit and I'm on my own two feet with a bit of genuine support.

² The Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making program is provided by community agencies working with extended family members and communities to empower them to meet and make decisions about the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal children and young people subject to Child Protection intervention.