

# KEEP CARING



Systemic inquiry into  
services for young people  
transitioning from  
out-of-home care

SUMMARY for  
YOUNG PEOPLE

# WHAT is the COMMISSION for CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

The Commission is an independent body that advocates for the rights, safety and wellbeing of all children and young people in Victoria.

## ABOUT the KEEP CARING INQUIRY

In 2020, we did an inquiry into what it's like for young people to transition from out-of-home care to independence.

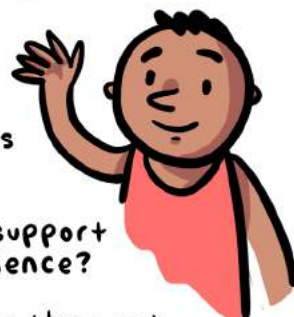
We wanted to answer three key questions:



What happens in young people's lives when they leave care?

Do young people in care get enough support to make the transition to independence?

Once young people have left care, do they get enough support as they start out in life?



## WHO DID WE SPEAK to?

We spoke to over one hundred young people about what leaving care, or preparing for leaving care, had been like for them.

## WHAT IS OUT-OF-HOME & LEAVING CARE?

Kids of all ages go into out-of-home care when it's not safe to stay at home with their parents. There are about 8,000 kids in care.

Most are in kinship care, cared for by relatives - some are in foster care, looked after by volunteers and a smaller number (around 400) live in residential care or 'resi' usually in a unit with other kids and with workers instead of carers.

A young person 'leaves' out-of-home care in Victoria when they exit care between their 16th and 18th birthday. About 600 young people leave care every year.

## ABOUT this SUMMARY

This is an illustrated summary which shows the main things we learnt in our inquiry and includes what young people told us about what it's like to leave care and what needs to change.

## INTERESTED in KNOWING MORE?

Head to: [ccyp.vic.gov.au/upholding-childrens-rights/systemic-inquiries/keep-caring](https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/upholding-childrens-rights/systemic-inquiries/keep-caring)

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# WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUNG PEOPLE when they LEAVE CARE?

Young people in out-of-home care have aspirations for their life when they are grown up, just like everyone else.



Unfortunately, many young people face a lot of challenges to making their aspirations a reality when they leave care.



At least one third become **homeless** within three years of leaving care.



More than two thirds of young people leave care without the **mental health** supports they need and more than half will go to acute public mental health services.



Almost half of young people about to leave care are **no longer studying** or in any kind of training and face a high risk of **long-term unemployment**.



Too many Aboriginal young people leave care without support to stay **connected to culture**.

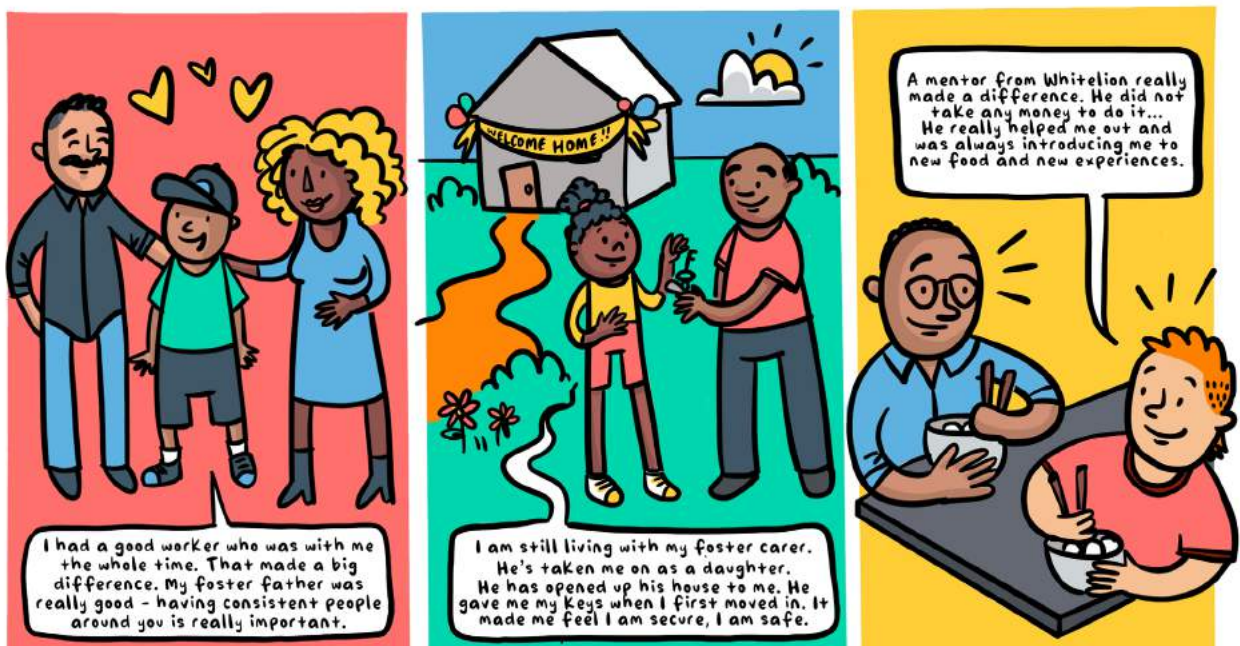


# DO YOUNG PEOPLE GET ENOUGH SUPPORT to MAKE the TRANSITION to ADULT LIFE?

When children and young people are in care, they have a right to support to reach their full potential. Some young people get the help they need to plan and get ready for their life after care, but too many miss out, especially kids in resi (residential care).



**But a good worker, carer or mentor can make a real difference.** They can help young people about to leave care find stability, repair broken relationships with family and connect to mental health, work, education or training supports.



# DO YOUNG PEOPLE GET ENOUGH SUPPORT AFTER they LEAVE CARE?

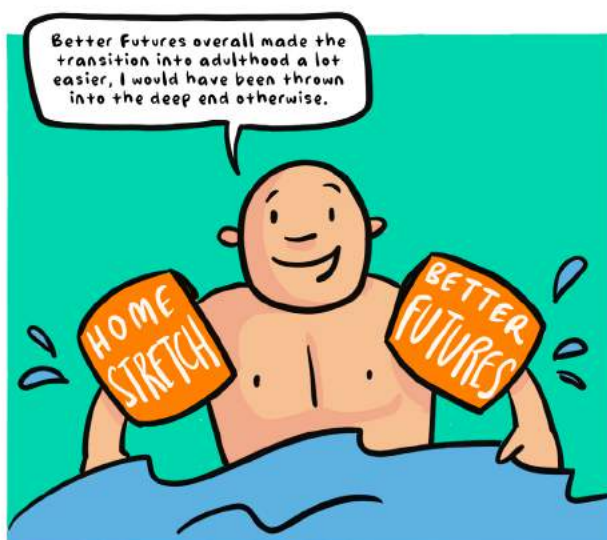
A lot of kids who have left care also don't get the support they need to return to education or training or deal with trauma. Often Aboriginal young people leave care disconnected from culturally safe services and supports. The biggest problem for many young people who leave care is that they can't find somewhere stable to live.



But some young people told us new programs, like **Better Futures** and **Home Stretch**, were making a difference by supporting young people before and after they leave care. Unfortunately the inquiry found these programs were not funded enough to support all young people who need it, particularly for young people who are still in care.

Better Futures is a new service which supports young people before and after they leave care with a case worker and flexible funding. The level of support Better Futures gives depends on the young person's needs. In November 2020, the government said it would increase funding for Better Futures for young people in care, and those who have left care, until they are 21.

The Home Stretch program provides young people who have turned 18 years with the opportunity to remain with their kinship or foster carer, or to transition to independent living, with support until they reach 21 years of age. This allowance is also available to Kids leaving care from resi. Home stretch was limited to a maximum of 50 new program participants each year, but in November 2020 the government said it will extend the program so that everyone leaving care can receive this support.



# WHAT NEEDS to CHANGE?

The Commission said that **Kids in care need much more support in care to get ready for adult life, including support to:**



Help young people plan for their own future



Keep learning or return to study or further training



Develop their independent living skills



Heal relationships with family

We also recommend that the Victorian Government **fund the Better Futures program properly** so it can help all young people in care make the transition to independence, including young Aboriginal people.

We also told the government that every young person who leaves care has the right to:



A stable and safe home



An opportunity to learn independent living skills if they missed out in care



Extra help to keep learning or return to study or further training



Mental health and substance use supports