

GFORCE

Transition to Independence

Submission to the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry

March 2013

This submission on Transition to Independence was commissioned by the non-government members of G-Force a working group of the Child Protection Partnership Forum. The Report does not necessarily reflect the views of the Child Protection Partnership Forum, the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian or the Government members of G-Force.

INTRODUCTION

GFORCE is a working group of the Child Protection Partnership Forum, which seeks to improve outcomes for young people transitioning to independence .

It is comprised of government and non-government members including:

- Create Young Consultants
- Create Foundation
- Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian
- Child Protection Development, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services
- Child Safety NGO Program, Dept of Communities
- Foster Care Queensland
- PeakCare Queensland
- Non government service providers
- Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak Ltd
- Queensland Council of Social Services.

In February 2013, the Commission of Inquiry released a Discussion Paper seeking further submissions by March 2013. Chapter 6 of the paper specifically addresses issues relating to young people leaving care and posed three questions:

1. To what extent should young people continue to be provided with support on leaving the care system?
2. In an environment of competing fiscal demands on all government agencies, how can support to young people leaving care be improved?
3. Does Queensland have the capacity for the non-government sector to provide transition from care planning?

This submission identifies strategies for improving outcomes for young people transitioning to independence, increasing efficiencies in service delivery and reducing longer term costs. It sets out:

- the need for change
- a shared framework
- collaboration and coordination
- service review and development
- the age of leaving care support
- related strategies.

THE NEED FOR CHANGE

The current approach to supporting young people transitioning to independence is limited and ad hoc in terms of the nature of the support provided and access to that support across the state. Research shows that outcomes for these young people are generally poor.

Not all young people transitioning to independence have the same needs. Some young people will transition to independence whilst continuing to live with their kinship or foster carers, whilst others may return to live with family or establish themselves in their own accommodation. Some young people will be unable to maintain secure accommodation and may experience homelessness. For those young people with a disability, there may be additional and complex needs requiring more intensive assistance in transitioning to independence.

Young people transitioning to independence should have access to the same opportunities as those young people who are not in the care of the State. Most young people have access to the financial and emotional support of their families during transition to adulthood. Young people in care, where the state has been their parent, should not be disadvantaged in comparison to their peers.

Responsibility for the transition of young people to independence is shared by a number of stakeholders including young people, parents, carers, non-government organisations, the department, other state government departments and Australian government departments.

The State Government, as the 'parent' of young people in care, has a particular responsibility to meet their needs and ensure they have access to opportunities that support independent living.

There are significant social and economic costs to individuals, communities and governments of not meeting the needs of young people transitioning to independence.

The development of a shared framework and enhancing collaboration and coordination of key stakeholders has the potential to decrease costs whilst improving outcomes for young people transitioning to independence.

A SHARED FRAMEWORK

Responsibility for the transition of young people from care to independence is shared by a number of stakeholders including young people, parents, carers, non-government organisations, the department, other state government departments and Australian government departments. Whilst there is some documentation available about the roles and responsibilities of the key stakeholders, there is not a shared understanding of what key stakeholders are trying to achieve, how they go about their work and how what they do relates to the work of other stakeholders.

GFORCE has previously proposed the development of a shared framework across government and non-government organisations for the transition of young people from care

to independence. The following briefly outlines the purpose and scope of a shared framework. A copy of the proposal is attached.

Purpose

A shared framework would:

- focus attention on the needs of young people and the shared responsibility held for meeting their needs
- detail the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders is required to support the effective transition of young people from care to independence
- provide the foundation for an individualised, flexible and integrated model of transition from care to independence that coordinates the efforts of key stakeholders
- improve linkages between services for young people in care and post care
- establish minimum standards and support good practice.

Scope of the framework

The framework would cover:

- Vision
- Principles
- Key stakeholders
- Key phases
- Life domains
- Roles and responsibilities
- Structures and processes for case planning
- Structures and processes for service planning.

ENHANCED COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION

A shared framework provides the foundation for more effective collaboration between stakeholders and coordination of their activities. Collaboration and coordination would be enhanced by establishing and/or enhancing processes at three levels:

- Individual case planning

The need for all young people in care aged 15-25 to have a transition to independence plan should be reinforced and monitored.

Transition to Independence Teams comprised of key stakeholders including the young person, family, carer, non-government organisations involved in their care, CSSO and other non-government organisations involved in their care. One person should be identified to coordinate the delivery of services to the young person. This person should be whoever is best placed to undertake the role.

- Regional

Regions should establish a Transition to Independence Alliance comprised of key stakeholders to:

- discuss young people with high support needs and facilitate their access to services including where necessary the pooling of resources.
- plan, develop and monitor local service responses, and identify and address barriers to young people accessing services.

A Transition to Independence Resource position should be established within each region to facilitate and support the operation of local governance structures and processes.

- State

The State government should develop a whole of government response to young people transitioning to independence including identifying and addressing barriers to young people accessing health, education, housing, employment and welfare services, and providing priority access to services. South Australia's Rapid Response initiative provides a useful example of a whole of government response to the needs of young people.

The Child Safety Director's Network and the Child Protection Partnership Forum could play a role in driving and monitoring a whole of government response.

Collectively, these collaborative processes would significantly improve young people's access to current services, more effectively coordinate the delivery of those services, create opportunities for innovation and therefore improve outcomes.

SERVICE REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT

Within a shared framework for transition to independence as previously outlined, young people require access to a range of services including:

- information and referral service
- mentoring
- individual casework support at sufficient intensity to meet their needs (this will vary across young people)
- individual case management
- independent living skills development
- priority access to mainstream services
- access to brokerage funds for accommodation, education/training/employment and access to health and counselling services (not supported by Medicare).

The mix of services required will vary according to each young person's need and the point at which they are in the process - preparation, transition or after care. Further detail on what

assistance and services young people identify are required at each phase is detailed in CREATE Foundation's *What's the Answer?* report.

Further work is required to review existing services and current arrangements for the delivery of transition to independence to ensure all young people have access to these services on a needs basis. This work includes:

- identifying demand (number of young aged 15-25 and level of need)
- mapping existing State (EVOLVE - Transition, Youth Housing and Reintegration Service and After Care Services, Life Without Barriers) and Commonwealth services (TILA and Youth Connections)
- identifying patterns of service utilisation of existing services and outcomes of available evaluations of service delivery
- clarifying the respective roles and responsibilities of Child Safety Service Centres and non-government organisations for casework and case management
- identification of service gaps
- redirection of existing funds and/or change of purpose to meet the identified service gaps
- identification of additional funds required and the development of budget proposals for government consideration.

It should be noted that CSSCs are currently responsible for case management and some casework responsibilities, whilst the non-government sector has some responsibilities for day to day care and some responsibilities for casework for children up to eighteen years. Neither CSSCs or non-government organisations are funded to work with young people once they turn 18 years of age. Within the context of the process outlined above, consideration needs to be given to funding Transition to Independence Workers placed in either CSSCs or non-government organisations subject to decisions about casework and case management responsibilities.

Particular attention must be given to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, their current access to services and the development of culturally appropriate services. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations should be funded to provide these services.

This action would support the development of an individualised, flexible and integrated model of transition from care to independence, which effectively utilises existing funding and service whilst identifying service gaps and any additional funding requirements.

EXTEND LEAVING CARE SUPPORT AGE

The legislative requirement for the Chief Executive to support young people after they transition from care to independence needs to be extended from 18 years of age to 25 years. Research in the United States, demonstrated that better outcomes for young people in care were achieved (with a consequent result of significant cost savings because of reduced demand for expensive support services) in states where young people were supported beyond 18 years. Other states including Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and the Northern Territory have extended the age at which young people care can

continue to receive support after leaving care. This action would provide a legislative base and enhance accountability for this work, improve outcomes and reduce costs.

RELATED STRATEGIES

Record Support Service Cases

Develop the capacity to count the number of Support Cases opened by departmental staff to provide transition to independence support to young people post 18 years of age by amending the ICMS or through another means. This action would provide a clearer indication of how many young people are receiving support post 18 years of age.

Enhance Training of Carers

The role of carers and residential care staff in assisting young people in developing independent living skills and supporting young people transition to independent living should be acknowledged and promoted. A transition to independence competency based training module for foster and kinship cares, residential care staff and non-government service providers should be developed and implemented. This action would increase the understanding and knowledge of participants and improve service delivery.

Improve the Evidence Base

In addition to activity based data, the evidence base for transition to independence could be significantly enhanced by identifying appropriate outcome measures to better assess the impact of programs and services on young people. This action would support evaluation of program and services, assist in identifying what is working and what isn't working, and improve outcomes for young people.

G-FORCE: A SHARED FRAMEWORK FOR TRANSITION FROM CARE TO INDEPENDENCE

Project

G-Force has identified the need to develop a shared framework for the transition of young people from care to independence. An initial workshop has been held to scope and commence development of the shared framework.

This report to the Child Protection Forum details progress and seeks support for the continued development of the shared framework.

The report outlines the purpose and scope of a shared framework, and provides an initial consideration of the content required.

Background

Responsibility for the transition of young people from care to independence is shared by a number of stakeholders including young people, parents, carers, non-government organisations, the department, other state government departments and Commonwealth government departments. Whilst there is some documentation available about the roles and responsibilities of the key stakeholders, there is not a shared understanding of what key stakeholders are trying to achieve, how they go about their work and how what they do relates to the work of other stakeholders.

Most recently, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs together with the National Framework Implementation Working Group developed a nationally consistent approach to planning, supporting an effective transition from out-of-home care to independence (2011). Whilst this approach acknowledges the key participants in planning, it does not describe the roles and responsibilities of the participants.

Appendix One lists relevant policy, procedural or practice guidance about transition from care to independence.

Purpose of a shared framework

A shared framework would:

- focus attention on the needs of young people and the shared responsibility held for meeting their needs
- detail the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders is required to support the effective transition of young people from care to independence.
- provide the foundation for an individualised, flexible and integrated model of transition from care to independence that coordinates the efforts of key stakeholders
- establish minimum standards and support good practice.

Scope of the framework

The framework should cover:

- Vision
- Principles
- Key stakeholders

- Key phases
- Life domains
- Roles and responsibilities
- Structures and processes for case planning
- Structures and processes for service planning

Vision

The vision should focus on the outcomes sought for young people. It needs to reflect:

- a focus on young people and their happiness, fulfilment, potential, goals
- what is an effective or successful transition
- access to opportunities
- that the process is supported and ongoing - post 18 and beyond.

All young people transitioning from care to independence are connected and supported within their communities and are afforded opportunities to realise their hopes and dreams

or

Young people are supported until they become adults both emotionally and physically and are ready to live independently (adapted from CREATE Victoria, 2000)

Principles

The principles should include reference to:

- being centred on the young person's focus
- valuing diversity
- a common understanding of young people, their needs and what we are working toward
- flexibility
- connecting supports
- collaboration and partnership - trust, honesty, transparency, modelling
- not being competitive
- interchangeable roles - whatever it takes

Key stakeholders

There are informal and formal stakeholders. There is a need to value and promote informal stakeholders as they are the people that will form the support networks necessary to provide ongoing support to young people as they transition to independence.

The young person is the primary focus and therefore the key stakeholder.

Informal stakeholders include:

- Family - parents and extended family
- Other community members - neighbours, cultural, religious
- Mentors
- Community groups - recreational, sport, interests

Formal stakeholders include:

- Direct carers - kinship or foster carers/residential workers
- Non-government service providers
- Department of Communities - CSO, CSSO, Team Leader etc
- Education - school/TAFE/university personnel
- Health - counsellors, psychologists
- Employment - job seeker networks/Youth Connections
- Centrelink personnel
- Housing workers

Key phases

The key phases on transition from care to independence include:

- Preparation
- Transition
- After-care.

The key activities in each of these phases are detailed in the national approach to planning document.

Life domains

The life domains include:

- housing / accommodation
- health
- education and training, employment or other suitable activity
- financial security
- social relationships and support networks
- life skills
- identity and culture
- legal matters.

The key strategies in each domain are detailed in the Transition from Care Report (Working Party, 2009)

Roles and responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of each of the formal stakeholders can be considered against the key phases and life domains.

The workshop with G-Force members included initial discussion about the roles of young people, carers, CREATE, NGOs, Disability and the Department. Additional information about roles and responsibilities in relation to carers, NGOs, Evolve and the Department was identified and collected.

Further work needs to be done to identify role and responsibilities with reference to the key phases and life domains.

Integration

An integrated approach to transitioning from care to independence is required at all levels including policy, service planning and development and practice. This project focuses on two levels, case planning and service planning.

Case planning

Case planning refers to structures and processes for assessment, planning, implementation and review to meet the individual needs of young people.

Planning occurs in a number of forums including:

- the department - case plan
- the NGO - care plan
- EVOLVE plans.

Key discussion points included:

- the linkages between planning within the different forums
- the quantity and quality of case plans addressing transition
- the involvement of young people in planning and their knowledge of plans
- developing the informal connections and supports should be an explicit goal of the plan
- who should drive the detailed development of a transition plan (within the context of the young person's case plan, which is the department's responsibility) - could this be the person who has the relationship with the young person necessary to engage them and others in identifying their needs and developing strategies to address those needs for consideration of the overall 'care team'
- concern about the lack of guidance for what should be addressed within a transition plan/that the detailed transition planning is getting lost in care planning - should the transition plan be part of the Department Care Plan or a separate plan or could it be a 'sub-plan' within the plan.

Service planning

Service planning refers to structures and processes for supporting identification of needs, service development, and governance arrangements to support intensive case management across organisations, government departments, and service systems.

Two departmental regions were identified as having developed 'advisory groups' of key stakeholders to promote and coordinate more effective responses to the needs of young people.

Key discussion points included:

- who should be involved
- role of the groups

Appendix One: Policy, Procedural or Practice Guidance

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

- National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 and Implementation Plan 2009-2012
- National Out of Home Care Standards - Standard 13
- Transition from Out of Home Care to Independence - A Nationally Consistent Approach to Planning
- National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness and Queensland's Implementation Plan

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

- National Partnership on Youth Transitions - Learn or Earn
- TILA

Department of Human Services - Centrelink

- Youth Allowance

Department of Communities (Child Safety)

- *Child Protection Act 1999*
- Transitioning from care to adulthood policy statement
- Supporting children and young people in care through transitions
- Transition from care: Information to assist young people during meetings to plan their transition to independent living
- Minimum Service Standards for licensed out of home care services

Department of Communities (Disability, Home and Community Care Services)

- Transition and Post Care Support Program - Operational Practice Manual
- Transition and Post Care Program - Fact Sheet
- Transition Officer - EVOLVE - Position Description

Department of Communities (Housing)

- MOU with Child Safety

Non-government Sector

- Minimum Service Standards for licensed out of home care services

Foster and Kinship Carer Handbook

- Helping the child in your care move from care into adulthood