



Place-based study: Sunshine Coast

Queensland
Family & Child
Commission





Acknowledgements

This study would not have been possible without the generous sharing of time, experience and data from participants and organisations.

The Queensland Family and Child Commission thanks the Sunshine Coast place-based study participants for their contribution to the study, and their ongoing commitment to supporting Queensland's children, young people and their families.

It is important to note that this study was qualitative in nature, and as such the findings reflect the views and perceptions of participants.

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Executive Summary



Purpose

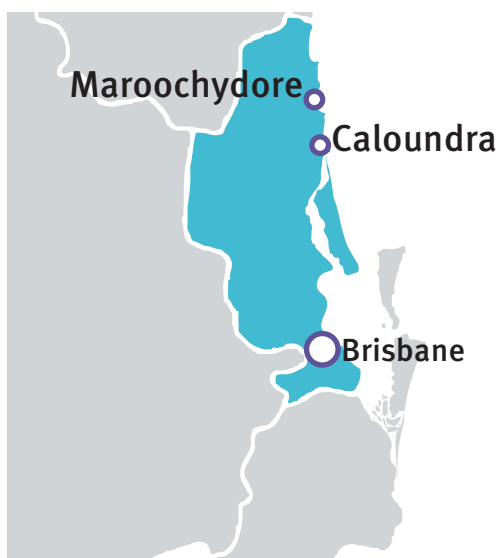
This place-based study was designed to examine transition services in the Sunshine Coast in terms of the local-level outcomes being achieved for young people transitioning to independence. The study explored:

- available services and supports
- young people's participation in transition planning
- facilitators and barriers to improved outcomes
- local partnerships.



Setting

- The Sunshine Coast is approximately 100 kilometres north of Brisbane.
- The scope of this place-based study was the Caloundra and Maroochydore Child Safety Service Centre catchments, which are both major cities within the Moreton Region of Child Safety Services.
- Caloundra and Maroochydore are hubs for transition services across the Sunshine Coast which means they provide outreach services.

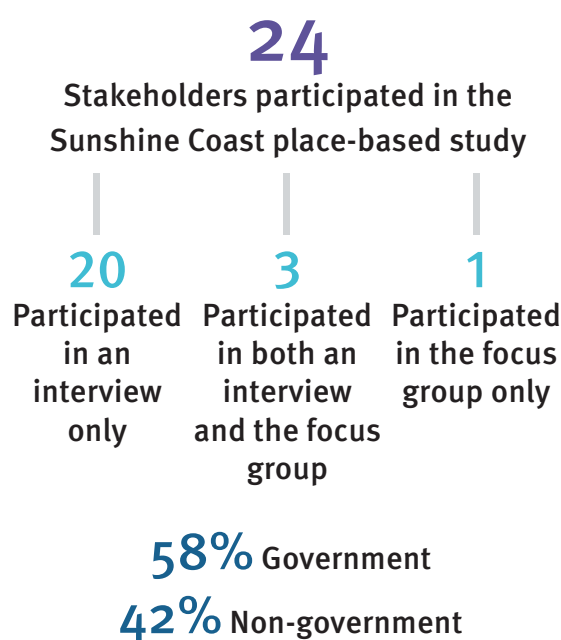


Method

- A desktop review of literature, service documentation and Child Safety Services data was undertaken.
- Local stakeholders helped us to identify the target population—stakeholders involved in supporting young people transitioning from out-of-home care in the Sunshine Coast.
- We visited the Sunshine Coast over a two-week period.
- We ran interviews with local stakeholders from:
 - local and regional governance groups
 - government agencies
 - non-government organisations.
- We conducted a follow-up focus group with key stakeholders to test findings and explore information gaps.



Sample





Key findings

Facilitating Factors		
Transition planning process	Local 'transition' service system	Culture, leadership and partnerships
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Early, gradual planning is critical and facilitates young peoples' readiness to transition to independence.• Young peoples' agency should be encouraged, and they should lead decisions about their future.• Services leave the door open for young people who are not ready to engage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consistency and continuity of support networks enable positive outcomes.• Diverse services exist to assist young people transitioning from care, and these services are tailored to young peoples' needs.• Strong local service networks exist and the high demand for services is met through collaboration and creative means.• Outreach, co-location and mobile services improve service access for young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is sector-wide commitment to achieving positive outcomes for young people.• Positive and respectful language is used when talking about young people.• Aspirational approaches are targeted at getting young people out of disadvantage and into education and employment opportunities.• Multi-sector collaboration and linkages exist at all levels with the common goal of improving outcomes for young people.
Barriers		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited capacity for services to engage with young people early enough in the transition planning process inhibits developing the relationships needed to support young people leaving care.• There are some gaps in the local provision of youth services, including specialist mental health services, disability and healthy relationships/domestic violence services.• There is some lack of awareness, particularly among young people, about the types of services and supports available locally.		
Opportunities		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Further developing the 'life skills program' for young people leaving care currently being offered by the T2A team. This would support the development of young people's readiness and independent living skills prior to their transition.• Development of a strategy for disseminating information about local supports and services for young people leaving care.		



Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Purpose of place-based studies	1
1.2	National policy context	1
1.3	The Queensland reform environment	2
1.4	Child Safety Services' policies and practices	3
1.5	Transition to Independence services on the Sunshine Coast	3
2	Method	5
3	Context	6
3.1	Setting	6
3.2	Socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the Sunshine Coast	7
3.3	Child Safety Services data about Sunshine Coast families	8
3.4	Next Step After Care and Beyond Expectations statistics	8
4	Findings	9
4.1	The transition planning process	9
4.2	The local 'transition from care' service system	11
4.3	Culture, leadership and partnerships	15
5	Summary	19
5.1	Key findings	19
5.2	Recommended next steps	19
6	References	21
	Appendix A: Consultation Guide	23
	Glossary	24



List of Figures

Figure 3-1: Map of Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women Moreton Region	6
Figure 5-1: Key findings of the Sunshine Coast place-based study.....	20



1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of place-based studies

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) conducts place-based studies across Queensland to build a narrative of the local-level outcomes being achieved within the child and family reform environment.

This place-based study was conducted as a stand-alone study and no attempts will be made to generalise or compare findings to other locations.

Overall, the place-based studies contribute to measuring the strategic objectives of the *Supporting Families, Changing Futures* reform program.¹ Each place-based study provides a deep dive qualitative account into one of seven strategic reform objectives with a narrowed focus to a key topic area.

1.1.1 This study

The focus of the current study was a key topic within Strategic Objective 4—Improving care and post-care for Queensland children and young people: **Young people are supported to transition to independence.**

This qualitative, place-based study was designed to explore the perceptions of stakeholders based within the Maroochydore and Caloundra Child Safety Service Centre catchments of the Sunshine Coast.

This report provides the perceptions of a subset of key local stakeholders in relation to this topic, and is not a comprehensive overview of the state of the child protection and family support system at the Sunshine Coast.

Consistent with our other place-based studies, stakeholders discussed how issues experienced at their local (service system) level linked to broader service system structures and processes, and the influence this has had on achieving outcomes for families.

It is therefore important to understand the policy context and reform environment in which we are operating, described in the remaining sections of this chapter.

1.1.2 Structure of this report

This section described the background to this study in terms of the reform environment, policy setting and local context.

Section 2 of this report describes the study methods, while Section 3 describes the context in which the study was undertaken, drawing on population data, Child Safety Services data and program statistics for Next Step After Care and Beyond Expectations.

Section 4 describes the findings of the study by key topics:

- The transition planning process
- The local service system
- Culture, leadership and partnerships.

Section 5 summarises the report and recommended next steps.

The consultation guide and a glossary are included in the Appendix.

1.2 National policy context

There is a substantial body of research indicating the transition from adolescence to adulthood is a significant social and developmental stage requiring adequate resources and access to educational, employment and housing options as well as support from family.²

Many young people transitioning from the care of the state, from either residential out-of-home care or foster care, do not have access to such resources or family support, thereby increasing their vulnerability and risk of poor or unstable outcomes. This can be exacerbated by trauma experienced as a result of neglect or abuse prior to entering, or whilst in, care. In recognition of the significance of transition from care, it has been identified as a policy priority at both the national and the state level.

In 2009, the Council of Australian Governments released the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020*. This document outlines a unified national approach to protecting Australian children and young people. It promotes shared responsibility across

¹ Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (2018). *Supporting families changing futures*.

² Campo, M. & Commerford, J. (2016). *Supporting young people leaving out-of-home care*.



society, including all levels of government as well as communities, businesses and families.³

A priority project under the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020* was the development of National Standards for Out-Of-Home Care. These standards were designed to deliver consistency and drive improvements in the quality of care provided to children and young people.

Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments have committed to improve support for young people leaving care as a priority, in recognition of the financial and social cost of poor outcomes for this cohort.⁴ The need for an early and comprehensive transition planning process is outlined in the National Standards for Out-Of-Home Care, Standard 13.⁵

This standard requires practical support and skills development to prepare young people for the future and for independent living, and includes detailed plans—to be reviewed regularly—for accessing affordable housing, health services, education and training, employment and income support.

1.3 The Queensland reform environment

1.3.1 The Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry

In 2013, The *Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry* (QCPCOI) undertook a review of Queensland's child protection system. Its final report dedicated a chapter to the subject of transition from care, having found “disconcerting gaps both in transition planning and in the targeted provision of post-care support”.⁶

The report highlighted the importance of transition planning and support for young people leaving care, especially those with complex needs (including

disabilities and mental illness) for whom the transition to independence is often fraught with risk and challenges.⁷

The report outlined three recommendations focussed on improving transition support which centred on improving and prioritising young people's access to state and federal programs and services in the areas of education, health, disability services, housing and employment services, and on shifting the delivery of transition from care services to the non-government sector. The report suggested that government fund the non-government sector to deliver a continuum of services, from planning to post-care case management and support.

The QCPCOI also recommended a process of cultural change to develop a positive culture in the practice of child protection for government and the community.⁸ This was addressed in the *Strengthening Our Sector Strategy 2016-2019* which aimed to improve the way the sector works with children and young people. The Strategy promoted shared responsibility and collaborative partnerships to shift practice culture from one of blame and risk aversion to a positive and supportive culture, where everyone—including families and communities—works together and shares responsibility for delivering outcomes for children, young people and families.⁹

1.3.2 Development of Next Step After Care

Following acceptance of the QCPCOI recommendations and commencement of the Queensland Child Protection Reform Program, the Queensland Government committed \$11.8 million over four years towards a new program called Next Step After Care, which would give young people leaving the child protection system access to 24-hour support for the first time.¹⁰

The Next Step After Care program would provide young people aged 15–21 years who had been in care with support to build independent lives. Ten regional service providers were funded to provide this service across Queensland.

³ Commonwealth Government (2009). *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020*.

⁴ Commonwealth Government (2011). *An outline of national standards for out-of-home care*.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Queensland Government (2013). *Taking responsibility: Queensland's Child Protection Commission of Inquiry: Final Report*, p.291.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Queensland Government (2016). *Strengthening our Sector: A strategy for working together for a responsive sustainable service system across the child and family support sector: 2016-19*.

¹⁰ Queensland Government (2015). *New services help young people with life after care*.



In October 2018, changes were made through the enactment of the *Child Protection Reform Amendment Act 2017* to strengthen transition processes by extending support eligibility to 25 years of age and including the legal requirement for transition planning to commence from 15 years of age.¹¹

A 2019–20 budget outcomes statement confirmed the Queensland Government has approved a funding enhancement to redesign the Next Step After Care program, commencing from 2020. The ‘Next Step Plus’ program, developed in consultation with children and young people and sector stakeholders and informed by a 2017 evaluation,¹² is designed to feature stronger partnerships and investment in critical services such as health, housing and education.¹³ The program will extend eligibility for support from age 21 to 25 in line with changes made to the *Child Protection Act 1999* in 2018.

1.4 Child Safety Services’ policies and practices

The Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women’s Child Safety Practice Manual states that transition from care planning is to be a joint process between a Child Safety Officer and a young person, to be undertaken throughout the case planning cycle of assessment, planning, intervention and review.¹⁴ This is backed by legislation requiring Child Safety Officers to commence the planning process by age 15, and continue through age 25.¹⁵

The transition planning process provides an opportunity for ‘creative case work’ between the Child Safety Officer and the young person to collaboratively develop a transition to adulthood plan. The young person should play a central role in the process by articulating their goals (and their worries) so a pathway can be customised and pursued collaboratively. A transition to adulthood plan for the future¹⁶ is recorded by Child Safety Services in the young person’s case plan document.¹⁷

The Child Safety Practice Manual states that the transition from care process should be “an ongoing process for young people in care [...] from the time a young person enters care up until their transition to independent living.”¹⁸ It advises Child Safety Officers to take time to actively listen to and be with a young person to understand their past and present as well as their hopes and dreams for the future. Transition planning should include the young person’s foster or residential carer(s) as well as service providers such as Next Step After Care.

1.5 Transition to Independence services on the Sunshine Coast

1.5.1 Next Step After Care

Integrated Family and Youth Services (IFYS) was funded by the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women to provide Next Step After Care in the North Coast region.¹⁹ The North Coast Next Step After Care service aims to improve the quality of care and post-care support for young people. It provides them with access to tailored and individual support including practical advice and face-to-face support and referrals relating to housing, managing money and entitlements, relationships, education and training, job readiness, legal advice, health and safety.

It is a voluntary service delivered in close partnership with government and non-government providers. Young people can access the service all-hours through a statewide connections program by calling or texting 1800 NextStep or by visiting the Next Step After Care website.

The North Coast bolstered its service response for young people transitioning to independence through the design of a new transition service system. Driven by a frontline workforce committed to improving outcomes for young people, this approach was given the authority to proceed

¹¹ Queensland Government (2017). *Child Protection Reform Amendment Act 2017*. S41(74)(1)(2a,2b).

¹² Venables J, Tilbury C & Jenkins B (2017). *Final report on the evaluation of Next Step After Care services*.

¹³ Department of Safety, Youth and Women (2019). *Next Step Plus – Enhancing transition from care: 2019-2020 Budget outcomes*.

¹⁴ Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (no date). *Transition from Care: Practice Resource*.

¹⁵ Queensland Government (2017). *Child Protection Reform Amendment Act 2017*. S41(74)(1)(2a,2b).

¹⁶ Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (no date). *Transition from care: Practice resource*.

¹⁷ Department of Safety, Youth and Women (2019). *Transition to adulthood*.

¹⁸ Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (no date). *Transition from care: Practice resource*, p.1

¹⁹ North Coast region has now become part of Child Safety Services’ Moreton Region.



through significant investment and change to the system's structure and operations.

1.5.2 Beyond Expectations and Live, Learn and Earn programs

In response to the 2014 Regional Careers Aspirations Strategy, North Coast Child Safety region and IFYS secured joint funding from the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women's Director-General's Innovation Fund to pilot an employment program. The program aims to improve job prospects and outcomes and raise career aspirations for young people who were either currently, or who had previously been, within in the child protection system.

The program, Beyond Expectations, operates in the Sunshine Coast, Gympie, Moreton Bay and Brisbane. It provides intensive support to young people aged 15–19 years who have had contact with the child protection system, and assists young people to reengage in education, access training opportunities and gain the skills and confidence to obtain employment.

The initial 12-month trial of this Sunshine Coast employment intervention program was evaluated by the University of the Sunshine Coast using a control-group design. The evaluation found the trial to have been successful in providing a significant number of young people in the program with employment and training opportunities, as evidenced by program monitoring data showing a large initial uptake of the program.²⁰ A time-series qualitative survey of Beyond Expectations

participants found that the program had beneficial effects on wellbeing and career aspirations.²¹

Funding was secured for a second year from the (then) Department of Education, Training and Employment to deliver Beyond Expectations, revising the program to target young people aged 15–19 who were disengaged from the education system and out of work. In 2017–18, the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (DESBT) took over funding the program for an additional 12 months. In 2018–19, IFYS secured funding to deliver Beyond Expectations, expanding delivery to the entire Moreton Region.

IFYS have established the 'Live, Learn and Earn' team which incorporates the Beyond Expectations and Next Step After Care programs. 'Live, Learn and Earn' offers young care leavers support, advocacy and practical assistance through these and other services and programs.²²

1.5.3 Dedicated 'T2A' team

The Maroochydore Child Safety Service Centre has a dedicated team, called 'Transition to Adulthood' or 'T2A', which is wholly focussed on supporting young people through the transition process. While not unique to the Sunshine Coast, not all child safety service centres have dedicated T2A teams.

The T2A team employs strategies bringing young people together to offer them collective support and importantly, provides continuity for young people so they build trust with their workers, the Child Safety Officers.







²⁰ Miller, P & Shong, S (2017). *Beyond Expectations: Final Report*.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Integrated Family and Youth Service (2019). *Support Programs*.

2 Method

The approach to undertaking this study is described below.

Aspect of Method	Summary of approach
 Sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The target population was stakeholders involved in supporting young people transitioning from out-of-home care in the Sunshine Coast region. Participants included members of the Regional Child, Youth and Family Committee (RCYFC) and representatives from state government and non-government organisations. A total of 24 stakeholders (58% government, 42% non-government) participated in the study. Of these, 20 participated in a semi-structured interview only, three participated in both an interview and the focus group and one stakeholder participated in the focus group only.
 Recruitment and procedure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RCYFC members and the RCYFC Secretariat provided guidance and support in identifying and connecting with the target population. The QFCC contacted relevant stakeholders to invite them to participate. The QFCC participated in a local cultural awareness training prior to commencing the study. Data collection occurred between May and July 2019. We supplemented primary data with a desktop analysis of relevant administrative documents and available location-specific data.
 Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two methods for collecting primary data were used: semi-structured interviews and a focus group. An interview guide containing nine questions (complemented by a series of sub-questions) was used to guide the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A). Not all questions were asked of all participants. The semi-structured format allowed the discussions to be tailored depending on the perspective of the interviewee and their depth of knowledge of the topic. A follow-up focus group was undertaken with key stakeholders. The purpose of the focus group was to test findings, explore information gaps and discuss the commonalities and differences between stakeholders' views, while maintaining confidentiality. The focus group was interactive to allow participants to brainstorm about local issues and develop the next steps prior to presenting study findings to the RCYFC.
 Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We analysed qualitative data from interviews using NVivo Pro 12 (qualitative coding software), using deductive thematic analysis to code and analyse themes in the data. The coding structure comprised conceptual categories reflecting the interview structure and the themes that emerged through the discussions. Data was organised, coded, analysed and interpreted by a minimum of two people to improve consistency and cross-check analysis.
 Ethics and consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethical clearance was obtained from the Townsville Hospital and Health Service Human Research Ethics Committee LNR/2019/QTHS/51525. Participants were given a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form outlining the process and potential risks. Prior to commencing data collection, signed, informed consent to participate and to have the interview or focus group recorded was obtained from all participants.
 Limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not all invited stakeholders participated in the place-based study. Some declined the offer to participate, and some were unavailable. The place-based study did not involve direct consultation with young people. Any outcomes reported for this cohort are based on the views of local stakeholders.



3 Context

3.1 Setting

The scope of this place-based study was the Caloundra and Maroochydore Child Safety Service Centre (CSSC) catchments. Both Caloundra and Maroochydore Child Safety Service Centres fall within Child Safety Services' Moreton Region (see Figure 3.1), an area of 6,460km² which also includes Brisbane.



Figure 3-1: Map of Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women Moreton Region

While this study focussed on the Sunshine Coast, we acknowledge that the catchments of various child protection and family support services may not align. Stakeholders with whom we consulted provide services outside of the Caloundra and Maroochydore CSSC catchments, therefore the qualitative findings relate more broadly to the Sunshine Coast.

According to the Australian remoteness structure, both Caloundra and Maroochydore are classified as Major Cities.²³ The Sunshine Coast traditional owners and custodians are the Kabi Kabi/Gubbi Gubbi people and Jinibara peoples.

The Sunshine Coast Council area encompasses 229,065 hectares and is located approximately 100 kilometres north of Brisbane CBD in South East Queensland.²⁴ At the time of the 2016 Census, the resident population was 294,367, with 1.9 per cent identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, compared with 4.0 per cent for Queensland.²⁵

²³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018). Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): Volume 5 – Remoteness Structure.

²⁴ Sunshine Coast Council (n.d.) *Sunshine Coast Council Community Profile*.

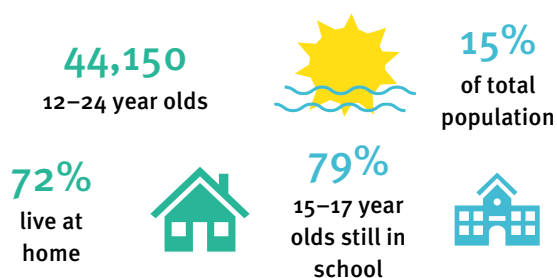
²⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018). *2016 Census Community Profiles*.



3.2 Socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the Sunshine Coast

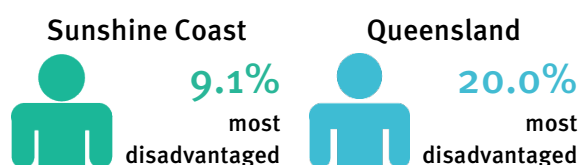
Youth

44,150 people aged between 12 and 24 years live at the Sunshine Coast.²⁶



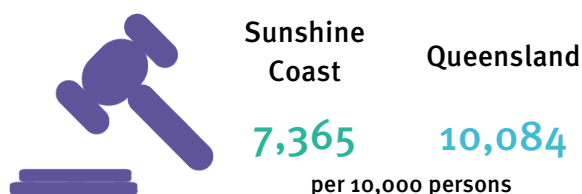
Disadvantage

Based on 2016 Census data, Sunshine Coast residents were less likely to be in the most disadvantaged Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) quintile²⁷ compared with the Queensland average.²⁸



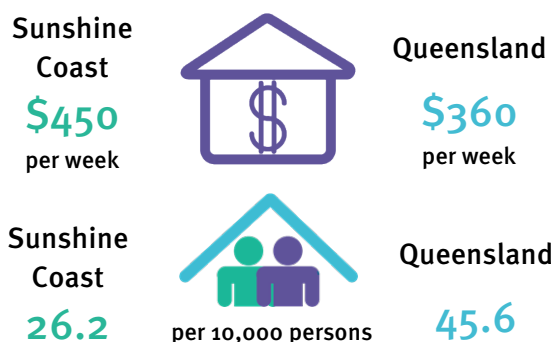
Crime

Rates of reported offences were lower at the Sunshine Coast compared to Queensland in 2017–18.²⁹



Housing and homelessness

Median rent for a three-bedroom house at the Sunshine Coast in 2018–19 was higher than the state average.³⁰ According to the 2016 Census, rates of homelessness at the Sunshine Coast were lower than the state average.³¹



Income

According to the 2016 Census, the median total personal income for Sunshine Coast residents was lower than the Queensland average.³²



Unemployment

In 2019, rates of unemployment at the Sunshine Coast (6.3%) were similar to the Queensland average (6.1%).³³ Rate of youth unemployment were also similar.³⁴



²⁶ Sunshine Coast Council (2018). *Sunshine Coast Youth Action Plan 2018 – 2021*.

²⁷ The Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) ranks geographical areas in terms of their relative socio-economic disadvantage (in quintiles) from most disadvantaged to least disadvantaged.

²⁸ Queensland Government Statistician's Office (2019). *Queensland Regional Profiles – Sunshine Coast Local Government Area (LGA)*.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Queensland Government Statistician's Office (2019). *Regional youth unemployment, October 2019*.



3.3 Child Safety Services data about Sunshine Coast families

As at 30 June 2018, there were 2,248 children aged 0–17 years in the Moreton Region who were subject to a Child Protection Order.³⁵ For many young people, the transition to independent living occurs at age 18, however some people younger than 18 years may also transition to semi-independent or independent living, depending on their circumstances.

At the local level, as at 30 June 2018, there were 56 children and young people aged 15 years and over subject to a Child Protection Order across the Caloundra and Maroochydore Child Safety Service Centres.

These young people were living in a range of placement types including foster care (n=12, 21.4%), kinship care (n=14, 25.0%) and residential care (n=17, 30.4%).³⁶

Transition to adulthood planning had commenced for 37 (66.1%) of these young people and more than four in five (n=31, 83.8%) of these had participated in the planning process.³⁷

3.4 Next Step After Care and Beyond Expectations statistics

3.4.1 Next Step After Care

In the 2018–19 financial year, IFYS received 127 referrals to their Next Steps After Care (Maroochydore) program. The majority of their referrals came from Child Safety Services and from young people self-referring.

In the April–June 2019 quarter, IFYS were providing support to 52 clients (42 aged 18–21 years, 10 aged 21–25 years).

Of these 52 clients:

- 30 (57.7%) were male, 22 (42.3%) were female
- 10 (19.2%) identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- 28 (53.8%) were parents or expecting parents
- 12 (23.1%) had been previously incarcerated.

A large number of positive outcomes were recorded across the cohort. They included increasing a young person's independent living skills (287 outcomes), housing related (142 outcomes), educational or employment achievements (113 outcomes) and becoming connected to family, culture and community (83 outcomes). Twelve young people were assisted to obtain their driver's or learner's licence, with staff supervising logbook driving hours with the IFYS car obtained from the Buderim Foundation in 2016.

3.4.2 Beyond Expectations

Between April 2018 and April 2019, IFYS received 87 referrals to their Beyond Expectations program on the North Coast (Gympie-Strathpine). The majority of program referrals (80.0%) came from Child Safety Services. Among the 87 young people referred:

- 35 (40.2%) were male and 52 (59.8%) were female
- Their ages ranged from 15–19 years
- 32 (36.8%) identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- Two-thirds (n=58, 66.7%) actively engaged with the program.

Thirty-seven of the young people engaged with Beyond Expectations achieved a positive outcome during the 12-month period. Outcomes included enrolling in Beyond Expectations training (n=25), enrolling in external training courses (n=17), gaining employment (n=16) and returning to school (n=4).

³⁵ Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (2019). *Ongoing intervention phase*.

³⁶ The remaining 23.2% of young people were in a range of other placements including hospitals, Queensland youth justice centres and independent living.

³⁷ Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (2019). *Transition from care: Unpublished data*.

4 Findings

Participants described the characteristics of the services they provided, their local networks, and how these networks contributed to better outcomes for clients. Anecdotes and examples were provided to illustrate their stories. A range of factors facilitating positive outcomes for young people transitioning from care in the Sunshine Coast area were identified. While most feedback received related to strengths of the local system, some barriers and challenges were also reported.

This section describes the key findings of the study by the following themes:

- The transition planning process (section 4.1).
- The local service system (section 4.2).
- Culture, leadership and partnerships (section 4.3).

Each sub-section commences with a summary of key findings, before the study findings are described in greater detail with illustrative quotes from participants.

4.1 The transition planning process

Participants said that developing and supporting young people's readiness was a significant component of their transition planning service delivery.

Key findings

Local facilitating factors

- Early, gradual planning is critical and facilitates young peoples' readiness to transition to independence.
- Young peoples' agency should be encouraged, and they should lead decisions about their future.
- Services leave the door open for young people who are not ready to engage.

Local barriers

- Limited capacity for services to engage with young people early enough in the transition planning process inhibits developing the relationships needed to support young people leaving care.

4.1.1 Transition planning factors facilitating improved outcomes

Young peoples' readiness and independent living skills

Research has established that young people experience better outcomes and cope better after leaving care if they are well prepared for the transition, and that transitions need to be flexible, gradual and well-planned.^{38 39 40}

A young person's 'readiness' to plan for, and transition to, independence was identified by participants as a significant factor influencing transition outcomes.

"What we've found is that a lot of the young people who have transitioned are used to relying on someone to provide the answer or the goal or the solution. If we started those earlier conversations around "You're transitioning to adulthood, that means we're building your skills around resilience", it needs to be starting much earlier." (P1)

Services identified that the way a young person has been supported during their out-of-home care experience and whether these processes had created reliance or independence could influence the success of their transition. Participants suggested that generally speaking, young people from stable foster care placements needed less supports than young people leaving residential care placements, particularly when they were able to remain living with their foster family.

"[We're] always looking at how can we build up these kids' safety and support networks because once they reach 18 or even older, and we're not a predominant part of their life, who's going to be there to pick them up? We do try to prepare them for those semi-independent living environments, before they reach 18. We're now starting to do some of that predictive planning [for] young people who are turning 15/16, they're going to be ready for that semi-independent living at say 16 or 16½, so let's support them in those steps and what they need to do to get there so that come 18, they're better placed to transition. They've got a real clear path around where they can go to for support, what their education and employment goals are. It's more planned I think which does then have better outcomes." (P2)

³⁸ Mendes, P., Johnson, G., & Moslehuddin, B. (2011b). *Young people leaving state out-of-home care: Australian policy and practice*.

³⁹ Dixon, J., Lee, J., Stein, M., Guhirwa, H., & Bowley, S. (2015). *Corporate parenting for young people in care: Making the difference?*

⁴⁰ Stein, M. (2012). *Young people leaving care: Supporting pathways to adulthood*.



Participants identified that a major focus of their practice was on fostering young people's independent living skills.

"We're working on your independence so we won't be here to carry the [shopping] basket in the future and nor will your carers. We need to build on those skills. We don't just give them a voucher, we go and do the shopping with them and teach them how to cook it. It's not a monetary service where we'll just go and buy things. If we buy a bed, we buy the sheets and we'll go and make the bed with the young person. It's going that step further because it would be easy just to buy a bed or send them away with a fridge or give them a card for Woolworths and not see anything change. Then they'll come back the following week asking for the same card, and we haven't actually developed any of those skills. It's not just everybody here doing the work for you. You've got to do your bit as well." (P1)

Post-care support services are voluntary, meaning that young people do not have to engage. Some may not be ready when first contacted by a service. Participants reported that they will make multiple attempts to encourage a young person to engage. If the young person isn't ready to engage, they will ensure they communicate the option of accessing their service up to the age of 25.

For older cohorts that have already transitioned from care, participants agreed that the responsibility for seeking out services should be placed on the young person rather than being pursued by a service provider. Services are often busy and full to capacity, and there simply aren't the resources available to actively pursue young people that have already transitioned from care.

"Being under the pump and as busy as I am, I do attempt to ensure that all of the young people get the supports that they need because I've got that capacity to do that, right? But I still have to leave it up to them to raise their hands." (P7)

"It's huge in terms of the amount of demand for this service so we're very conscious of prioritising our work. If we responded to everything in the detail we wanted to, we'd never have the capacity so we're very conscious. We do regular check-ins with the team and regular reviews of our case work and case plans because sometimes we do have to say "we can't do all of that, we have to scale back." Which again talks to why we use our referral system and our community system." (P1)

Young peoples' agency and participation

A range of accounts were offered by participants that spoke to the ways in which transition planning occurs locally. Participants agreed that in the Sunshine Coast area, young people play a major role in the transition planning process.

"They are totally in the driver seat when they access this service. We will see them as often or as less—it's really about building their trust and that's one of the things we do come across when they've been in institutions. They are not used to that. They are so used to being told what to do, when to do it and so that creates some of those so-called negative behaviours that we sometimes see, but it's just because they have no control over their lives. They have to learn how to do that." (P10)

"We're definitely client-centred—it's all practiced around them and what their needs are and how they want to drive it. It's going to be their life and we won't always be around, so it's about them. It's really personal choice around who they want to connect with. We give them the options of the [range of] community programs around here, but it's really them who drive it. So, if they don't want to engage in that, or say "I'd like to get engaged in that," then that's what we'll pursue for them. We also look at milestones and age-appropriate development and things like that to make sure they're properly hitting them and if there's anything we need to intervene but otherwise they're driving it." (P9)

4.1.2 Planning factors that are barriers to improved outcomes

Transitioning from Child Safety Services to post-care services

Participants reported that they often do not have the capacity to begin working with young people until shortly before they formally leave the care of Child Safety Services at age 18. This can create some challenges including:

- only having limited time to establish a relationship with the young person
- having problems contacting those who may have left the care of Child Safety Services early and those who are self-placing.

Participants reported that some of these issues had been mitigated with the establishment of a dedicated T2A



team at Maroochydore who had been working collaboratively with other service providers. In particular, this team has been able to assist with tracking down young people who may have disengaged from Child Safety Services. This team has also been assisting with predictive planning so services are aware how many young people will be transitioning from care in future.

“It helps having your specific T2A workers because thinking back when it was within just a normal CSO [Child Safety Officer] case load, it’s a different way of thinking and I think sometimes it’d lose that transition to independence [focus].” (P2)

Opportunities

Consideration should be given to introducing more formal life skills education for young people in care. The T2A team are currently running monthly activities around shopping and cooking. Further developing this program would support the development of young people’s readiness and independent living skills prior to their transition and promote more successful transition outcomes.



The different structures of the two Child Safety Service Centres in the region presents a unique opportunity to commission/conduct a comparative study to determine if there are benefits or improved outcomes for young people by having a dedicated T2A team. The results of this study could be far-ranging, potentially informing structures and practice for supporting young people transitioning to independence across the state.

4.2 The local ‘transition from care’ service system

The Australian Institute of Family Studies published a comprehensive literature review which explored factors associated with improved outcomes for young people transitioning from care and identified some priorities for support provision.⁴¹ The review emphasised the importance of fostering young people’s support networks, the need to address their trauma and mental

health needs as well as their needs around housing and related issues.

The Sunshine Coast local service system, including Next Step After Care services, provides a range of options for supporting young people transitioning from out-of-home care to independent living that address many of the support priorities identified by the literature. These include practical assistance around housing and accommodation, training and employment, health and wellbeing and relationship support.⁴²

While a general program of local supports and services designed to support young people through the transition process was available, participants emphasised that young peoples’ circumstances are highly diverse. There was therefore a need to tailor responses to each young person’s needs and preferences, rather than filling vacancies as they arose. The structure of the local ‘transition from care’ service system was conceptualised with young people at the centre of the design. Participants described a range of scenarios in which flexible, responsive and tailored services were used to meet the unique needs and preferences of young people reaching out for support. Participants also described some local barriers to successful transitions.

Key findings

Local facilitating factors

- Consistency and continuity of support networks enable positive outcomes.
- Diverse services exist to assist young people transitioning from care, and these services are tailored to young peoples’ needs.
- Strong local service networks exist and the high demand for services is met through collaboration and creative means.
- Outreach, co-location and mobile services improve service access for young people.

Local barriers

- There are some gaps in the local provision of youth services, including specialist mental health services, disability and healthy relationships/domestic violence services.
- There is some lack of awareness, particularly among young people, about the types of services and supports available locally.

⁴¹ Campo, M. & Commerford, J. (2016). *Supporting young people leaving out-of-home care*.

⁴² Department of Safety, Youth and Women (2019). *Next Step After Care*.



4.2.1 Service system factors facilitating improved outcomes

Consistency and continuity of care teams

There is a body of research that shows how important support networks are during the transition process in terms of positive outcomes for the young person.⁴³ For many young people, support networks will usually include family, siblings and friends. For young people in out-of-home care, support networks might comprise their foster or residential carer(s) and broader care team.

The Maroochydore Child Safety Service Centre's dedicated team of transition support workers, the 'T2A' team, employ strategies to build confidence and collaboration skills in young people while providing continuity so they build trust with their Child Safety Officers, and broader care team consisting of external organisations that provide resources, support and training as required.

Participants spoke of the efforts made to link young people with support workers and mentors that work to their strengths and avoid pairings that would exacerbate challenges. This was done to ensure the young person is surrounded and supported by people that encourage them to succeed and maintain high expectations for them to achieve their goals. Efforts were also made to link young people with like-minded peers and role models that push them and challenge them to succeed.

"It's really their connection with an adult more so than anything. Like if they've been able to connect really positively with at least one adult, doesn't matter the program, that's really driven their success." (P9)

"When they get those supports and go through those courses and do all those things, they're actually with people of their age that want to succeed, so then they build those relationships as well to support each other to get through that next process. Sometimes they'll rent privately together or do something like that and they'll share accommodation, so there's more success stories that way." (P3)

Housing and employment tailored to young peoples' needs

Assistance with housing and employment were significant priorities for local service provision. Housing and employment were identified by participants as being interlinked and critical elements of successful transitions.

"Just safe, secure housing and just trauma informed care and not having a record that follows them. They're kind of key. Stable housing and employment." (P10)

"I guess the security of employment, which then gives them the affordability to be able to sustain accommodation, so I think that's really important, is the employment when they're transitioning. You know we see the vast difference between ones that are unemployed and getting that independent accommodation." (P9)

Participants raised issues around eligibility and affordability for young people transitioning to independence at the Sunshine Coast. For example, the Sunshine Coast does not have a housing shortage, however, much of the housing stock is not affordable for young people leaving care. Participants believed that some young people ended up couch surfing or living in unsuitable housing arrangements because they were unable to access appropriate housing.

Participant perceptions were consistent with national data. The National Cities Performance Framework Dashboard⁴³ shows that, of the Australian cities in scope, the Sunshine Coast has the highest dwelling price-to-household income ratio (9.3, compared to the median of 5.8) and the second-lowest number of public and community housing units per 100,000 people (940 units, compared to the median of 1720 units). These figures illustrate the challenges facing a young person seeking a foothold in the region's housing market.

Participants spoke about the myriad considerations required when placing a young person in individual or shared accommodation, not the least of which are the young person's preferences, but also factors such as mental health, wellbeing and social connectivity (i.e. location of family and other support networks). A housing vacancy—public or private—may not be suitable for a young person seeking accommodation, in which case

⁴³ Australian Government Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities. *National Cities Performance Framework Dashboard*.



alternatives need to be sought. While this may delay the achievement of stable housing, it is preferable to placing a young person in an arrangement that is unsustainable.

“It’s case coordination and determining what is going to be most appropriate for that young person. It’s determining whether or not you think that they can obtain or sustain a tenancy in a private market, and then looking at doing some other options within that, whether or not that will be a referral point to either a boarding house, whether or not they could cope with that, whether it’s a community housing provider as a transitional property so they can actually get better support within that wrap-around service or whether it would be more suitable for a long term housing need or a referral to [a service provider] which offers supported accommodation.” (P3)

Participants mentioned that formal arrangements are in place between the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women and the Department of Housing and Public Works, which prioritise access to public (social) housing for young people leaving care, but that public housing was not always the best solution for young people transitioning to independence. Participants were aiming, where possible, to support young people to secure private tenancies and employment.

“We’ve definitely seen that be successful where [young people] have been in transitional [housing], got employment and then transitioned into the private market rather than into social housing. And we’re always very careful when we look at social housing solutions for young people because complexes are full of people that have a wide range of complex issues themselves.” (P3)

Participants highlighted the diversity of young care-leavers and the importance of carefully tailoring the service response to the young person.

“Some have some really strong goals, they’re really independent, they actually don’t need long term social housing and putting them in a unit complex would be, you know, not appropriate. So it’s about determining what is going to be the most appropriate thing. That’s not solely on our shoulders either to determine that, that’s where we try and draw information out from the people that know them and what they need, trying to make the best fit from the start so they don’t go into a tenancy that they’re not going to be able to sustain or where they may be

pulled back into where they’ve made some really good steps in moving forward.” (P3)

Participants involved in career planning for young people transitioning from care acknowledged that young peoples’ career interests and aspirations may change over time and highlighted the need for them to work flexibly.

“Sometimes it’s been those jobs where we thought it’ll be so well suited to that young man and he went in and he spent the day there and the week there and he was high-fiving it with everyone at the end of it. They offered him a job at the end of it and he went, “No, no. I’d rather work in Kmart, I’ve done this.” (P1)

“Young people change their minds as well, and I’ll say last time I saw you, you wanted to be a firefighter and now you want to be an astronaut and in the future you’re telling me you want to be a paramedic. That’s all fine to me. I never expect anybody to know exactly what they want to do.” (P11)

The importance of young people being adequately prepared to commence employment was identified by one participant. They described the process they went through to support the young person.

“[A young person] wanted to work but probably wasn’t ready. So whilst he was already on that journey of getting a resume, looking at what opportunities are out there, getting himself prepared in terms of getting the right clothing for interviews and getting in the right head space. [We were] keeping him engaged in that program, building up confidence, he’s now interacting with people and conversations become very much focussed on a job and being ready for work. Then by the time [the young person] got to the job, he was ready to work.” (P1)

Participants reported a number of benefits gained by young people from more flexible approaches, including developing important life skills and fostering the young person’s support network.

“There’s so much more underneath the training, that’s the important bit rather than the training courses. Those core skills of being reliable, hard-working, [and having a good] work ethic.” (P1)

“We want them to know you can tell us about anything and we are going to talk about the possibilities for anything and I think that’s a pretty key message.” (P11)



Strong local service networks

This place-based study found there is a ready supply of services and supports to assist young people on the Sunshine Coast with the transition-from-care process. It also found there is high demand for services operating in this niche area of the child and family support system. Demand has increased as a result of extending the transition from care support period up to 25 years.

Participants reported that they work creatively and collaboratively to use the resources and services they have as effectively and efficiently as possible to get the best outcome they can for young people. It was evident that there are a deliberate range and mix of services targeting young people transitioning from care. Gaps have been identified through stakeholder networks and analysis of data and research, with new programs emerging to fill identified needs. For example, the Braking the Cycle program was brought into the region in 2018 to fill an identified need for young people in the region to obtain drivers licences in order to improve their employment prospects. Beyond Expectations was also developed out of an identified need for services specifically targeting young people transitioning to adulthood, in time evolving in form and function based on evaluation evidence (see section 1.5.2).

Participants indicated a strong preference for ‘wrap-around’ services that keep the young person at the centre of the service/support system. They described a range of ways this is achieved locally, such as service co-location and mobile services, both of which were viewed positively as a means of wrapping support around a person with multiple or complex needs. This approach also benefits young people with limited mobility.

“I think the other gap is that particularly for young people, their ability to access multi ranges of services in one location is really critical. Particularly if they’ve got no funding for public transport. We know public transport on the coast is terrible. That level of cognitive maturation I guess where they’re not necessarily great problem solvers at the best of times but trying to schedule a range of appointments across a week where if it can be a one stop shop. We’re currently exploring at the moment at Noosa, they have some social hubs up there and we’re looking at exploring a partnership where we’re involved in that—basically, it’s a one stop shop.” (P8)

“I think it’s services like the outreach stuff that can be really flexible with the young person because if

you turn up with a plan to do [a service] and they’re not in the right headspace and I think you’ve got to be flexible on that.” (P2)

While outreach is an important means of making services accessible to young people living in the outer reaches of the Sunshine Coast, it comes at a cost of time and money for services and their frontline workers.

“A lot of the mental health services now are doing outreach when historically they never did. So that’s a positive too, because you often can’t get young people to the service but if [the service] can attend [the young person’s accommodation site], this is a huge win.” (P9)

4.2.2 Service system barriers

Service system gaps

Participants identified some gaps in the availability of locally available support services. Access to specialist mental health support was flagged as a challenge for young people in the Sunshine Coast region, particularly for those experiencing both mental health and substance misuse disorders.

Participants reported that services are available to treat either mental health disorders or substance misuse disorders, but not young people with comorbid diagnoses. Further service gaps were identified around disability and healthy relationship/domestic violence support services.

Awareness of services

A broad range of transition services at the Sunshine Coast are provided and/or funded by local, state and federal governments, some of which are provided by non-government organisations. This complex network of services and providers may create challenges for young people with complex needs who are trying to navigate the system.

A potential barrier to service accessibility, noted by some participants, was knowledge and awareness of available services and supports—both by clients of the service and sector professionals that interact with young people requiring support.

“Young people can’t even find supports. We talk about are there gaps in support. No, well there’s gaps in knowledge. Nobody knows where we are or how to get to us. The biggest gap in service would be the lack of knowledge about services.” (P7)



The networks in the region help mitigate this barrier for professionals to some extent. Networks can facilitate strong relationships between services and agencies operating across the sector. Through these mechanisms, soft referrals can be made whereby a service provider working with a young person identifies an unmet need and facilitates a supported referral to another service. Participants indicated a preference for soft referrals, and for proactively seeking information from partners about which young people might be in need of support. Participants also noted that, when making contact with young people, their goal is to make sure the young person is aware of the support that is available—even if they aren't ready for the support at that time.

“We’re never cold calling and ringing someone out of the blue and saying, “Oh by the way, if you believe that somebody needs supports, why don’t you and the [organisation] worker and the transition case manager go and have a chat.” So, [the young person] has a nice, soft entry point as opposed to a piece of paper and getting a call out of the blue. It just doesn’t work and I know young people don’t pick up the phone when they don’t know somebody.” (P1)

Participants also commented on families’ awareness of services being a facilitator for service access. Several anecdotes of word-of-mouth referrals were cited.

“It’s word of mouth has been the biggest marketing tool for us because the program works. And that’s word of mouth between families and between the kids themselves. Mums talk, and grandmas talk, so a lot of referrals from grandmas. The agencies are also talking to each other. I got phone call [from another service provider who said] “I finally found out from another agency that this program exists.”” (P6)

There was evidence to suggest that a young person’s age has some bearing on their awareness of available supports and services, and therefore on their ability to access transition services. Young people that transitioned out of care in the years prior to the 2018 legislative changes, which extended the age of eligibility for transition services to 25 years, are now eligible to receive support for their transition process which wasn’t previously available. It was suggested that younger siblings were often the ‘gateway’ for their older siblings to access transition services.

“When Next Step first started almost four years ago now, the age group—the older end of the age group—didn’t have access to Next Step After Care Service.

This is the first time that they have actually had access to these supports. They are the sibling of so and so and it’s come as a pleasant surprise to them being 24 or 25 and being able to receive the supports of Next Step for the very first time. And also some of those young people have found out that they’ve got TILA [Transition to Independent Living Allowance] as well, so their TILA has been sitting there. If legislation hadn’t changed, they would have missed out—one, on the supports from Next Step and also access to their TILA which will go once they hit 25. I think it’s been different cohorts, but the need is absolutely still there and that need is emerging as well, and there hasn’t been any big campaign or launch of that. And at the same time people are still finding out.” (P1)

However, to the extent possible, participants indicated that efforts are made to ensure young people are made aware of the myriad supports available to them. When young people express an interest, they are supported to take up services depending on their needs, desires and preferences—and their readiness to engage with those services.

Opportunity

The Sunshine Coast RCYFC may consider developing a strategy to improve young people’s awareness of available services and supports in the local area to assist them to transition to independent living. This should include a dedicated approach for young people that transitioned from the system prior to the legislative changes in 2018 which made this older cohort eligible for support following their transition. If this opportunity is harnessed, consideration should be given to adequately resourcing the Next Step program to keep up with the increased demand this would cause.



4.3 Culture, leadership and partnerships

This place-based study found that the shift in culture and professional practice towards shared responsibility and collaborative partnerships, as recommended by the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry, was evident and actively practiced by local stakeholders at the Sunshine Coast. The study illuminated a professional culture of working together and shared commitment to delivering positive outcomes for young people.



Key findings

Local facilitating factors

- There is sector-wide commitment to achieving positive outcomes for young people.
- Positive and respectful language is used when talking about young people.
- Aspirational approaches are targeted at getting young people out of disadvantage and into education and employment opportunities.
- Multi-sector collaboration and linkages exist at all levels with the common goal of improving outcomes for young people.

4.3.1 Culture, leadership and partnerships factors facilitating improved outcomes

Capability and maturity of the workforce

The strong commitment to young people—in particular, those transitioning from care—was apparent throughout the consultation process. Participants relayed success stories of young people they've supported through the transition process, speaking with pride and recounting the joy they experienced when learning of the young person's ongoing success—having just received their 'P-plates,' securing an apprenticeship or showing off their new work outfit.

It was clear that, over the course of the service relationship, strong ties were made between young people and the adults that supported and stood by them as they transitioned to adulthood. Stories of this nature illustrated the rewards a frontline position can bring as young people achieve success and flourish.

"We just see these young people who when they get a job for the first time, suddenly their shoulders drop and their head goes up high and they change their whole demeanour. They change the way they communicate with their peer group, they change the way they talk about themselves, they develop their own self-identity which has got nothing about their past." (P1)

Participants demonstrated an understanding of the criticality of this work which seemed to extend beyond 'business as usual'. There was a strong belief that transition programs and services are critical, and to that effect, participants reported going the 'extra mile' to give their young clients the best possible chance at a successful transition. There was a sense that young

people would experience 'no closed doors' when actively seeking support.

Participants indicated a degree of tolerance for taking calculated risks. This was observed at a strategic level through the enablement of authorising environments and investment in trials and innovative projects to address issues. It was also evident at an operational level, such as when frontline workers are confronted with young people in crisis, or when young people request services that are out of scope. The anecdotes shared by participants suggest that workers are trusted to use their professional judgment and do what is necessary to problem solve, so long as it is in the best interest of young people's safety and wellbeing.

"If it's outside of our capacity to do it, then we will find a way somehow to make that happen within the sector and I think that's really a key. So rather than look at barriers, we look at ways to get it done. Which is refreshing." (P5)

Positive and supportive attitudes towards young people

This place-based study found the language used when speaking about young people reflects the positive, affirmative culture found in the sector. Strengths-based language and approaches were embedded to the point of being implied rather than explicit, and came across as being habitual rather than requiring any degree of effort.

There was a near absence of negative references or associations when participants spoke about working with young people, even when those young people were challenging to work with or rejected offers for support. Participants appeared content with the fact that young people need to be ready to accept support and were open to maintaining contact and remaining available when the young person is ready to engage.

Participants emphasised the importance of using appropriate language when working with young people transitioning to independence.

"[A young person] will go 'I'm so anxious about turning 18,' but they're only 15, then I'll say to them, 'That's why we talk about it now, so by the time you turn 18, we've spent three years talking about it, you won't even be worried.'" (P2)

Participants commented on how conversations of this nature were framed towards fulfilment of goals and pursuit of aspirations and dreams. There was a strong sense that young people from care backgrounds should



have all the same opportunities that other young people have, which means maintaining high expectations for young people to succeed.

“We’ve changed our language. To the young person, we don’t say “we’re going to close your file” anymore, we say “You’re doing really well, we can step aside for now because you’re standing really strongly and independently on your own. But if that ever changes, you can contact us directly.”” (P1)

“Attitudes have significantly, unbelievably changed over recent times in terms of seeing young people as being vulnerable and looking to family support, wanting to be involved in case plans for those young people for residential, so that we don’t have situations where police are contacted and there’s an incident because a young person’s out of control. We are wanting to be proactive and working together.” (P5)

“[Young people] just get on with ‘adulthood’ and just doing it with no supervision, just with a lease and their basic set of guidelines. Left alone to do their thing with the respect and the dignity of an adult to move forward and succeed. So most young people rise to that challenge.” (P7)

Aspirational outlook and empowering approaches

The transition from care service system in the Sunshine Coast region has been evolving for years. Participants referred to research showing that the people closest to young people in care often understate their potential and have low expectations of them reaching their aspirations.⁴⁴ This reportedly led to a career aspiration strategy in the region which gathered momentum as the sector got behind it and attention was focused on this cohort of young people. Leaders at the state and local level created the authorising environment and backed it with investment, at which time the program of work called Beyond Expectations was borne.

It was suggested that the region’s strong push of Beyond Expectations had far-reaching effects.

“There was this real focus around how we really aspire to get kids and young people on pathways that give them a trajectory into education and employment opportunities which break that cycle of disadvantage.” (P12)

“This local program really highlighted that it was all part of our jobs, to really focus on that as opposed to schools or teachers or something like that. And it certainly has come up with some really good outcomes, great results which still get the attention of the ministers and the [Directors-General].” (P13)

“We saw some state-wide changes to the Next Step service, which is a wide application across the state of providing support to young people transitioning to adulthood that didn’t exist prior to this project and that career aspiration strategy. You’d probably think it had its place in influencing decision makers around investing in something around this and certainly the research had to do that. [The local program is] tried and tested [and has been] able to demonstrate that it’s good public value, it works. So we’ve seen the wider application of some of those ideas into a state-wide program.” (P13)

Collaboration and service linkages

This study found evidence of significant multi-sector collaboration across the Sunshine Coast region, and community-wide coalitions that include partnerships—formal and informal—with local businesses. A range of networks and alliances exist in the region to connect the various players and address a range of issues.

At a strategic level, local leaders across the child and family support system, and agencies having touch points with the system, were found to share a common interest in achieving outcomes for this cohort of young people whilst pursuing their respective policy agendas. Across portfolios, it was evident that working relationships aided delivery of the strategic intent of the child and family reforms while allowing creative and flexible solutions to be pursued. The study found a culture of evidence-informed investments and decision making which focuses on outcomes, as opposed to outputs.

“I think there was really a sort of staff led, but evidence-based identification of needs. And then over time I think they might have influenced the agenda a bit but then the agenda moved to be really vocal somehow and support care leavers more effectively. Lots of things have come together really well to support that initiative.” (P12)

Partnerships were found at all levels. Government-to-government—at the local, state and federal levels—as

⁴⁴ Crawford, M., Tilbury, C., Creed, P. & Buys, N. (2011). *The role of carers and caseworkers in the school-to-work transition for young people in care*.



well as government to non-government and non-government to non-government partnerships were described. It was apparent that partnerships were intentional and deliberately pursued to meet identified needs, and requirements, of young people transitioning from care in the region.

The partnership between the Department of Child Safety and IFYS, the provider of Next Step After Care, is vital given their respective roles in supporting young people prior to and during the transition process. An arrangement between these two entities includes colocation of an IFYS worker at Child Safety Service Centres throughout the region (on a rotating basis). These services work closely together to ensure service coverage—or at a minimum, service offerings—to young people approaching the age of 18 and those that are transitioning out of care.

A number of participants attributed the collaborative culture (and achievement of outcomes) to the longevity of the workforce, and the movement of frontline workers within the child and family support system. The relationships were seen as facilitators for informed practice and broad systemic knowledge.

“I think one of the positives on the Sunshine Coast, it is relationship-based, but it is the longevity of staff. On the Sunshine Coast lots of agencies have had, particularly in their senior staff, so managers, team leaders, have all been on the Coast for a significant number of years and working together and I think that’s the shift and there are a range of agencies that have staff members that have been around for a really long time and have long existing relationships and goodwill and wanting to work together as opposed to competing for resources.” (P5)

Participants commented on how the relationships established with local businesses have facilitated young

people’s access to training and employment opportunities. For example, TAFE is a key partner in the region to reengage young people with education. Business partners offering employment and apprenticeship opportunities range from small not-for-profits to multinational corporations.

At an operational level, there was evidence of service linkages and crossover which was designed to maximise efficiencies, meet clients’ needs and minimise the burden on young people. The examples participants provided illustrated a local service system in which service providers work collaboratively, rather than competitively, for the benefit of young people.

Some initiatives were established to fill service gaps or to address growing trends observed by service providers. One example highlighted was an initiative whereby different art programs were joined together to engage young people who were congregating in small groups and sleeping rough, to provide harm reduction messages and raise awareness of the dangers of drug use.

The other benefit of service crossover described by participants was relationship building. Young people engaged with one service provider, which partners with another service provider, are exposed to other services and get to know their workers. Should the young person require those services in the future, the young person may already have an established relationship with the service provider which can facilitate access through the trust that has been built.

Throughout the consultation process, there was clear evidence of a culture facilitative of positive outcomes for young people underpinned by insightful leadership and productive partnerships. Overall, these features of the local service system are indicators of participants’ clear commitment to the wellbeing and success of the young people they are supporting.



5 Summary

The focus of the current study was a key topic within Strategic Objective 4— Improving care and post-care for Queensland children and young people: Young people are supported to transition to independence.

5.1 Key findings

Figure 5-1 summarises the key findings of the place-based study.

This study found that the Sunshine Coast service system had many features that facilitated successful transition

to independence outcomes for young people. Participants also identified some barriers and opportunities to support successful transition to independence outcomes for local young people leaving care.

5.2 Recommended next steps

The information in this report is intended to be used by local stakeholders to inform planning and decision making.

It is therefore recommended that this report be considered by the Regional Child, Youth and Family Committee.



Facilitating Factors		
Transition planning process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early, gradual planning is critical and facilitates young peoples' readiness to transition to independence. • Young peoples' agency should be encouraged, and they should lead decisions about their future. • Services leave the door open for young people who are not ready to engage. 	Local 'transition' service system <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistency and continuity of support networks enable positive outcomes. • Diverse services exist to assist young people transitioning from care, and these services are tailored to young peoples' needs. • Strong local service networks exist and the high demand for services is met through collaboration and creative means. • Outreach, co-location and mobile services improve service access for young people. 	Culture, leadership and partnerships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is sector-wide commitment to achieving positive outcomes for young people. • Positive and respectful language is used when talking about young people. • Aspirational approaches are targeted at getting young people out of disadvantage and into education and employment opportunities. • Multi-sector collaboration and linkages exist at all levels with the common goal of improving outcomes for young people.
Barriers		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited capacity for services to engage with young people early enough in the transition planning process inhibits developing the relationships needed to support young people leaving care. • There are some gaps in the local provision of youth services, including specialist mental health services, disability and healthy relationships/domestic violence services. • There is some lack of awareness, particularly among young people, about the types of services and supports available locally. 		
Opportunities		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further developing the 'life skills program' for young people leaving care currently being offered by the T2A team. This would support the development of young people's readiness and independent living skills prior to their transition. • Development of a strategy for disseminating information about local supports and services for young people leaving care. 		

Figure 5-1: Key findings of the Sunshine Coast place-based study



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Appendix A: Consultation Guide

Questions and sub-questions

1. Tell us about your role in supporting young people, in particular those in the child protection system.
2. What support is available to young people in this region to support their transition from care?
 - Are young people accessing the supports available up until 25 years? If not, why (i.e. awareness)?
3. Which services and supports are young people who are transitioning accessing the most?
 - I.e. Education and training; Health services; Mental health support; Driver's licence and transport; Connections—family, culture, community, mentors, sporting, teams; Financial; Access to information about their rights
4. To what extent are young people actively participating in their transition?
 - What motivates young people to participate in transition planning?
5. Does the experience of transitioning to independence differ for different groups?
 - Young people in foster and kinship care versus residential care?
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people?
 - Young people with disabilities?
6. Have you seen improved outcomes for young people in your region who are transitioning to independence?
 - What factors are facilitating improved outcomes for young people transitioning to independence?
 - What factors are inhibiting young people from successfully transitioning to independence?
 - Any suggestions for overcoming these?
7. Which services and supports are most beneficial to young people transitioning to independence?
 - Why? How do you know that your service is having a longer-term impact for young people who have transitioned?
8. From your point of view, describe the most significant change relating to young people being supported to transition to independence.
 - Why is this significant to you?
 - What difference will it make for young people?
9. To what extent are partners working together to achieve better outcomes for young people who are transitioning to independence?
 - Who do you frequently collaborate with when working with young people who are transitioning or preparing to transition to independence?
 - What is the nature of your relationship with them (i.e. formal versus informal)?
 - Are there gaps in services or supports that young people transitioning might fall through?



Glossary

Term	Description
Beyond Expectations	Beyond Expectations is a support program run by Integrated Family and Youth Service (IFYS) for young people who are or who were engaged with Child Safety and who are living in Gympie, the Sunshine Coast, the Moreton Bay region and Brisbane. The program helps young people to reengage in education, access training opportunities and gain employment.
Braking the Cycle	Braking the Cycle (BTC) is a Queensland-wide support program run by PCYC. It is a volunteer driver mentor program designed to support learner drivers without access to a supervisor or registered vehicle to complete their logbook hours. The aim of the program is to provide young people with increased employment opportunities, community connections and driver education.
Child Protection Order/s	An order made by the Children's Court under the <i>Child Protection Act 1999</i> , when a child is considered in need of protection.
Child Safety Service Centre (CSSC)	Child Safety Service Centres are located in communities throughout Queensland. They provide support and a range of services to children, young people, families and carers to ensure children's safety and wellbeing and to prevent children from being harmed.
Family and Child Connect (FaCC)	Family and Child Connect (a non-government community-based intake and referral service) was established to provide an alternative pathway for referring concerns about children and their families (other than a referral to Child Safety Services). Families, community members and professionals can access Family and Child Connect to get information, advice and/or referral support to access services so that families experiencing vulnerability receive the support they need as early as possible and without the involvement of the tertiary child protection system.
Intensive Family Support (IFS)	A consent-based support service provided by non-government community organisations that responds to families experiencing vulnerability with children and young people who are at high risk of involvement in the tertiary child protection system. Families may refer themselves or be referred to services directly from Child Safety Services, Family and Child Connect, other government agencies and non-government organisations with the consent of the family, or from prescribed entities and Regional Intake Services without the families' prior knowledge or consent.
Investigation and assessment	<p>The process of investigating a notification of alleged harm or risk of harm. It involves an investigation of the alleged harm and an assessment of the child's protective and safety needs. The outcome of an investigation and assessment may be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Substantiated—child in need of protection• Substantiated—child not in need of protection• Unsubstantiated• No investigation and assessment outcome• No subject child (where it is determined the child does not exist or is not a member of the household being investigated).
Next Step After Care	Next Step After Care is a Queensland-wide service that provides support to young people aged 15-21 who have been in foster care or other forms of out-of-home care who are transitioning to independent living. A number of supports are provided by the service including assistance with managing money, finding accommodation, training and keeping young people safe, strong and healthy.
National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)	The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is a national scheme which provides funding for supports and services for Australians aged under 65 who have permanent and significant disability. It also provides information for people with disabilities about support services available in their communities.



Term	Description
Out-of-home care	The provision of care outside the family home to children who are in need of protection or who require a safe placement while their protection and safety needs are assessed. Out-of-home care includes placement with kin, other home-based care or residential care services.
Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry (QCPCOI)	The Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry (QCPCOI) was established on 1 July 2012 to review Queensland's child protection system. The final report of the QCPCOI, <i>Taking responsibility: A roadmap for Queensland child protection</i> , was delivered to the Queensland Government on 1 July 2013. The QCPCOI report includes 121 recommendations, which form the Child Protection Reform Roadmap. They are the basis of the reform program, which is now referred to as <i>Supporting Families Changing Futures</i> .
Regional Child, Youth and Family Committee (RCYFC)	Regional Child, Youth and Family Committees determine regional priorities for implementing the <i>Supporting Families Changing Futures</i> reform program and the domestic and family violence reform agenda in line with statewide directions established by the Interdepartmental Committee and the former Child Protection Reform Leaders Group. They also play a key role in facilitating effective working relationships at regional and local levels. Nine committees have been established across the state.
Supporting Families Changing Futures	The QCPCOI report included 121 recommendations, which formed the Child Protection Reform Roadmap. They are the basis of Queensland's child protection reform program, which is now referred to as <i>Supporting Families Changing Futures</i> . This program has seven Strategic Objectives and aims to help families to protect and care for their children and ensure that children and young people in care prosper.
Transition to independence	Transition to independence is the process of a young person leaving foster care (or other forms of out-of-home care) to living independently. Queensland foster and kinship carers currently receive financial support until the young person turns 18 or until they finish high school. This is being raised to 19 years in 2020–21.
Transition to adulthood	Transition to adulthood is the planning process that occurs as part of the ongoing case work and review process with a young person from the year they turn 15. This planning provides an opportunity for young people to identify their future goals and needs, and to work towards these goals with the support of Child Safety Services and the community.
Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA)	The Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) is a payment of up to \$1,500 to assist eligible young people aged 15–25 years as they leave out-of-home care. The payment can be used for a range of expenses including buying furniture and paying for counselling, education and training courses.

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