“Can I survive on my own?”: Young people’s perspectives on the implementation of transition planning in out-of-home care

Transition planning | Implementation gap | Youth voice

Wainwright, H., Grage-Moore, S., Savaglio, M., Morris, S., Newton, D., Sait, R., Skouteris, H., & Mendes, P. (2026). “Can I survive on my own?”: Young people’s perspectives on the implementation of transition planning in out-of-home care. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-026-01155-w

Context: Transition planning is a core child protection practice designed to prepare young people in OOHC for independent living prior to leaving statutory Child Protection at age 18. In Victoria, Australia, transition planning is guided by the Looking After Children (LAC) Framework and mandates OOHC providers to complete and regularly revise a 15+ Care and Transition Plan. This qualitative study examined implementation barriers and enablers across five core practice domains based on semi-structured interviews and a focus group with 27 care-experienced young people aged 16–24 across residential (55.6%), kinship (25.9%), and foster (18.5%) placements.

Key findings: *Systemic and implementation barriers across five practice domains disrupt transition readiness*

1. Active participation

Key barrier

Adult-led one-off compliance process; high staff turnover disrupts trust and engagement.

Key enabler

Youth co-design, transparent communication, and consistent caseworkers.

2. Education and work

Key barrier

Age 18 exit disrupts final schooling; Centrelink prioritised over work.

Key enabler

Flexible trauma-informed schools and early career guidance.

3. Appropriate housing

Key barrier

Tenancy laws forbid pre-18 leases; high risk of homelessness or forced return.

Key enabler

Extended care model (Youth foyers, Home stretch) and housing choice.

4. Independent life skills

Key barrier

Abrupt shift to self-sufficiency without coaching (budgeting, driving).

Key enabler

Direct skill coaching, modelling, and practical resource access (NDIS).

5. Support networks

Key barrier

Statutory supports end at 18; rigid rules restrict peer connections.

Key enabler

Better Futures extended care to 21 and sustained mentor relationships.

Young people’s recommendations to improve transition planning:

1. **Support and housing accessibility**: Extend housing subsidies and placements up to age 25, providing early planning, guaranteed safe homes, and ongoing on-demand support contacts

2. **Relational and timely transition planning**: Initiate planning at ages 15–16 using personalized, strengths-based plans that give young people genuine decision-making power

3. **Residential placement environments**: Create smaller, homelike residential settings with stable staff, comfortable shared spaces, and the removal of rigid institutional rules

4. **Education and economic participation**: Embed education, career guidance, and practical employment preparation into daily routines up to age 21, protecting learning from housing disruptions

5. **Staff and carer capability**: Mandate lived-experience co-designed workforce training to foster staff stability, empathy, and practical coaching in essential life skills.