

Raising expectations

Reforming how we raise children and young people in care.

POSITION PAPER




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Queensland
Family & Child
Commission



Queensland
Government



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Executive Summary

“Care is not a placement. Care is a relationship”

As the Principal Commissioner of the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC), I am proud to present this synthesis report of the QFCC’s submissions to three key Commonwealth reviews: the National Out-of-Home Standards Review; the Foster, Kinship, and Permanent Carers Payment Review; and the Transition to Independent Living Allowance Review Committee. These submissions heavily feature the lived experiences and voices of young people, parents and carers, and provides vital insights into the real-world impacts of the child protection system.

The consultation papers developed to inform these reviews clearly demonstrate that while progress has been made to modernise the structures to assist caregivers in the child protection system, more work is needed to ensure the wellbeing of children in care and the carers who support them. Our submissions highlight the critical responsibility of the State in assuming the role of a parent when a child enters the care system, and for a carer to provide a safe, nurturing environment. This intervention, while necessary for the protection and safety of children in harmful situations, can inadvertently create a system where both children and carers lack the emotional, psychological, and practical support they need to succeed. This is a gap that must be addressed.

Foster carers, kinship carers, and those providing permanent placements for children play an irreplaceable role in the lives of young people. The research and feedback that the QFCC has gathered from young people and parents reveal that the structural support provided to carers is not sufficient.

The **Foster, Kinship, and Permanent Carers Payment Review** highlights the financial and emotional strain placed on carers. The QFCC calls for better compensation, enhanced resources, and more comprehensive support systems that meet the complex needs of the children they care for. These carers must receive adequate support so that they can provide the safe, stable, and nurturing environment that these children deserve.

The **National Out-of-Home Standards Review** emphasises the importance of ensuring high-quality care, and the need to move beyond a compliance model to a more nuanced approach that truly addresses the long-term success of foster, kinship and residential care placements. Through the voices of young people, we have called for a more individualised and supportive model of care - one that goes beyond meeting minimum requirements and fosters growth, healing, and stability for children. Our participation in this review reflects our commitment to shaping a system that focuses on the wellbeing and future of each child in care.

The **Transition to Independent Living Allowance Review Committee** provided opportunity to reflect on how young people in care are supported during their transition to adulthood. Through consultations with young people, we identified significant gaps in how the system prepares them for independence. Our findings highlight the need for a more personalised approach, with better tools, financial support, and resources to help young adults navigate the challenges of life after care. As these young people transition out of the care system, the state plays a central role in ensuring a smoother, more supportive process from care to independent living.

A successful child protection system not only safeguards children’s immediate needs but also ensures long-term stability, development, and opportunity. Our work, driven by the active participation of young people and parents, seeks a system that better supports children in care, and the carers who open their hearts and homes.

It is clear that more must be done. The findings and recommendations contained in these reports are critical in creating a child protection system that truly meets the needs of children and carers. Our work will continue to be informed by the voices of those with lived experience, ensuring that every policy decision and recommendation is grounded in the reality of what works, what doesn’t, and what is needed for meaningful change.

Background

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) has a legislated responsibility to promote the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people, and to improve the child protection system.¹ The QFCC hosts the Child Death Review Board (the Board), an independent body responsible for systemic analysis of the deaths of children known to the child protection system. In its three years of operation, the Board has reviewed the deaths of over 200 children. Each death of a child serves as a sobering reminder of the work still required to address the limitations of an overwhelmed system struggling to fulfill its core purpose: to protect children most at risk of harm and provide them with the opportunity to grow up to be safe, happy, and healthy adults. The Board's recent findings highlight how bureaucratic inertia and fragmented responsibility have led to inconsistencies in the delivery of care and support for children in care. The Annual Report 2023-24 reveals a concerning pattern of children in care experiencing instability in their placements, unmet health needs, poor educational outcomes, and a lack of meaningful family or cultural connection.²

The QFCC recognises the value of lived and living experience to inform policy decisions – particularly for children and young people. We maintain ongoing engagement with young people in care and provide opportunity to contribute to policy discussions; our conversations with young people in the Queensland out-of-home care system continue to highlight deep concerns about the current system and how it fails to meet the needs of vulnerable children. In our 2021 report, *Rights, Voices, Stories project report: Identifying what matters to children and young people involved with the Queensland child protection system*, we documented input from young people in the out-of-home care system. The message was clear: that they need more than a bed and food; they need positive and supportive relationships with trusted adults, consistency in care, opportunities to be heard, and a system that works actively to ensure their wellbeing.³ Children in care want to be treated with respect, seen as individuals, and given the same opportunities as any other child in the community. It is vital they are seen as more than a child 'in the system', but that they are seen for their humanity and their right to a loving, caring environment where they can thrive.

Children and young people in care experience some of the most significant challenges across any population group. Compared to their peers, they are more likely to experience:

- placement instability and homelessness
- underachievement in education
- poor mental and physical health outcomes
- involvement in the youth justice system
- young pregnancy and young parenting
- addiction and substance misuse
- self-harming and suicidal thought patterns
- disconnection from culture and community.

¹ Queensland Legislation (2014). *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*. legislation.qld.gov.au/view/pdf/inforce/current/act-2014-027

² Child Death Review Board (2023). *Annual Report 2022-2023*. [qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-08/Child Death Review Board Annual Report 2022-2023.pdf](https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-08/Child%20Death%20Review%20Board%20Annual%20Report%202022-2023.pdf)

³ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2021). *Rights, Voices and Stories project report: Identifying what matters to children and young people involved with the Queensland child protection system*. <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-06/Rights%20Voices%20Stories%20-%20Project%20Report%200.PDF>

These challenges are compounded by bureaucratic structures that often lack warmth, responsiveness, and continuity. At the core of the out-of-home care system is an essential truth: **when the state takes on the role of a child's guardian, it assumes the responsibilities of parenthood.** In practice, there is a systemic failure to fulfill this role in a consistent, accountable, and child-centred way. The very essence of corporate parenting demands that the state offers more than just a "place" for children to stay: It must provide stability, love, guidance, opportunities, and a safe space for children to thrive, much as any loving parent would.

Improved support for family-based carers

There is critical need for reform and redesign to a responsive, modernised system that takes into account the evolving needs of carers and the children they care for, and the critical role family-based care plays in achieving better outcomes for children. There have been numerous and profound social changes since the current model of formal foster care emerged across the Western world. In the past year, the QFCC has published two reports, the *Demographic Insights Report* and the *Carer Allowances Insights Paper*, both of which highlight the need for bold reform in Queensland's family-based care system. Insights from the community point to shifts in household dynamics, economics and motivations of the Queensland population which can shape the appetite to nominate to be a foster carer.^{4, 5, 6, 7}

We are running out of carers

The demographic insights report, *Preserving a vital system – the future of foster care*, stressed the need for innovative models of foster care and improved approaches to recruiting and retaining carers.⁸ Traditional pools of foster carers continue to shrink, which exacerbates the urgency to develop flexible and contemporary foster care models that can better meet the evolving needs of children and young people in our contemporary society. Collaboration between policymakers, agencies, researchers, and carers is crucial to creating a more responsive system. Better support structures are needed for existing and prospective foster carers, including financial support and training, as well as new strategies for recruiting diverse and committed carers.⁹ A comprehensive overhaul of the foster care system is required to ensure it is sustainable, inclusive, and capable of providing stable and nurturing environments for children in care, which adequately address the often multiple complexities which present for a child who has been exposed to adverse experiences or trauma.

Inadequate increases to carer allowances, when compared to rising living costs, make it increasingly difficult for carers to cover both necessities and enrichment activities for children. In January 2023, the base carer allowance in Queensland for each age bracket increased by 7.91 per cent; Queensland is the only jurisdiction that increases payments in January, rather than at the start of the new financial year in July. This increase occurs each year in line with the consumer price index (CPI). The input we have received from carers, from families, and from children in the out-of-home care system suggests that the annual increase of carer allowance in line with CPI is

⁴ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024). *Growing up in Queensland*. [qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-02/9022_QFCC_Growing Up in Queensland.WCAG reading order_01_COMPRESSED.pdf](https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-02/9022_QFCC_Growing_Up_in_Queensland.WCAG_reading_order_01_COMPRESSED.pdf)

⁵ Queensland Family and Child Commission, PeakCare (2024). *Preserving a vital system – The future of foster care: Queensland foster carer demographic insights report*. <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-06/Queensland-Foster-Carer-DemographicInsights-Report-PeakCare-June-2024.pdf>

⁶ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024). *Community perceptions survey 2024: Research report*. [Community Perceptions Survey research report - 2024.pdf](https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-06/Community_Perceptions_Survey_research_report_-_2024.pdf)

⁷ Queensland Foster and Kinship Care (2022). *Foster & kinship carers survey 2022: Report*. [care 2018 Carer Survey Report](https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-06/care_2018_Carer_Survey_Report.pdf)

⁸ Queensland Family and Child Commission, PeakCare (2024). *Preserving a vital system – The future of foster care: Queensland foster carer demographic insights report*. <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-06/Queensland-Foster-Carer-DemographicInsights-Report-PeakCare-June-2024.pdf>

⁹ Queensland Family and Child Commission, PeakCare (2024). *Preserving a vital system – The future of foster care: Queensland foster carer demographic insights report*. <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-06/Queensland-Foster-Carer-DemographicInsights-Report-PeakCare-June-2024.pdf>

not enough to meet the needs of children in family-based care, particularly when Queensland families are struggling more broadly with cost of living pressures. Recent comparisons of capital cities across Australia found that Brisbane has the third highest cost of living, behind only Sydney and Canberra.

Housing affordability across Queensland is decreasing, with rents increasing at a rate that far exceeds increases in wages, family support payments or the foster care allowance. In June 2018, the median weekly rent for a 3-bedroom house in Queensland was \$350. In June 2023 it was \$500, representing an increase of 42.9 per cent. When it comes to applying for a mortgage, children in foster care are considered as dependents, however, the carer allowance is not eligible to be included as income. Increases in rent and challenges for mortgage applications should be resolved to remove barriers for potential carers. There is urgent need to redirect resources to strengthen family-based care, which could better support foster and kinship carers, improve the attraction and retention of new carers, and provide more resources for kinship care.

Improved support for current and future carers

Foster carers, driven by a genuine commitment to providing a stable and nurturing environment for children, often find themselves faced with the complex task of maintaining placements despite the challenging behaviours exhibited by children with trauma. While foster carers strive to create a supportive atmosphere, they may encounter situations where additional assistance is essential to address the unique needs of children who are in their care. Seeking help, whether through specialised training, therapeutic interventions or support networks, is crucial for foster carers navigating the complexities of caring for children with trauma.

As young people in care get older, the cost to adequately support them increases, particularly because they have often experienced complex trauma. The Australian Child Maltreatment Study found that Australians who experience maltreatment are substantially more likely to have:

- mental health disorders;
- health risk behaviours; and
- higher health service utilisation.

While the costs of health-based services and specialist supports are generally covered, the costs of recreational and leisure activities and programs to support ongoing positive household dynamics and activities for the young person must be met within the carer allowance. These pro-social supports are critical to creating stable and positive environments but are likely to fall away when carers experience greater financial stress to meet day-to-day or 'crucial' expenses.

Community consultation with young people in the out-of-home care provides a grounding perspective on the urgent need for greater support for the family-based care system. Young people advocated for carers, speaking with passion and conviction for the social value of foster carers. Many young people we consulted with spoke positively of the carers they encountered and wished more effort was made to keep these foster care and kinship care arrangements together before they 'were moved' – into residential care. The young people also highlighted the importance of 'family' mediation or a debriefing team to assist the carers and young people when conflict did arise, to encourage resolution and reduce placement breakdown.

A dwindling pool of foster carers, increasing financial and social barriers to becoming a foster carer, and limitations in practical support for carers has contributed to the reduction in family based placements for young people in care, and a serious over-reliance on residential care as a primary placement option. Residential care often lacks the personalised and nurturing environments provided in family-based care.

Carer allowances and financial challenges

In the 2023 QFCC community survey, 89 per cent of carers stated that the cost of living negatively impacts children.¹⁰ Many carers shared that while they can meet children's immediate physical needs, there is limited funding for enrichment activities crucial for their development and wellbeing. The 2024 survey results reported that cost of living remains a significant concern, reporting fears of poverty, inflation, and financial strain in Queensland.¹¹ First Nations respondents in the Survey were more likely to highlight housing affordability and homelessness as major issues for families in Queensland (13 per cent, compared to nine per cent among non-Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander respondents).

The total average cost per year, per child, in foster or kinship care is \$30,660. The average annual cost for a child in residential care is \$420,548 -approximately 13.77 times higher. The *Carer Allowances Insights Paper* predicts that the number of children in residential care by 2028 will exceed 2,766 (190 per cent increase over a decade); in 2018, there were 951 children in residential care. Data modelling predicts that should this trajectory continue, one year of care for these children will cost the government over a billion dollars, based on current average expenditure for out-of-home care.¹² The reliance on residential care is economically unsustainable, for both the government funding out-of-home care and for carers struggling to provide support to the young people in their care.

The economic difference in annual expenditure by the system to provide care for children who have been removed from their family raises the question whether there is an opportunity for reinvestment in the family-based care system to address the gaps raised by carers and to strengthen the capacity of the family-based care system. Redirecting investment to family based care, from residential care, is crucial to provide adequate and meaningful resource assistance to existing and future kinship and foster carers

Redirecting investment to family-based care will not only benefit the day-to-day care of young people, but also potentially improve the attraction and retention of foster carers and free up resources for greater investment in kinship care. Increasing financial incentives for foster and kinship carers will:

- 1) improve the quality of care provided to children;
- 2) reduce financial pressures in the family-based care system;
- 3) reduce placement turnover and placement instability for children;
- 4) retain more foster carers in the system;
- 5) support more children to remain with kin;
- 6) reduce the number of children entering residential care; and
- 7) reduce placement breakdown.

Understanding modern carers and their needs

Although population growth expects to see a 17 per cent increase in the number of 'potential foster carers', cost of living pressures for the younger generations and increasing financial and caregiving responsibilities for middle-aged individuals is limiting the ability to become a foster carer for children in need of a stable family-based home.

¹⁰ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2023). Community perceptions survey 2023 — research report. <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-10/Community%20Perceptions%20Survey%20Report%202023.PDF>

¹¹ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024). Community perceptions survey 2024 — research report. <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-09/Community%20Perceptions%20Survey%20report%20-%20summary%20of%20key%20findings%202024.pdf>

¹² Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024). *Carer allowances. QFCC insights paper*. <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-C5/Carer%20allowances%20-%20QFCC%20insights%20Paper.pdf>

The demographics insights paper, *Preserving a vital system: The future of foster care*, found the shortage of traditional foster carers is not due to ineffective marketing campaigns, but rather a result of demographic tightening.¹³ Higher costs of living, including rent and accommodation expenses and higher education debts, pose a financial barrier to Millennials and Generation Z becoming foster carers. Financial decision-making is reflected in the general trends for this generation starting families in their 30s; for these same reasons, it is unlikely that these individuals would have the means, resources, and capacity to become foster carers in their twenties. Generation X, people born in the 1960s and 1970s, is an exceptionally small generation by population. This generation likely has their own children living in the family home until well into their twenties and concurrently are finding themselves increasingly financially and practically responsible for their aging parents. The capacity for Generation X individuals to commence foster caring at this life stage is extremely limited given these interacting pressure points for social and family responsibility. Acknowledging the challenges which exist for Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Y individuals which pose barriers to engaging in foster care, the reliance remains then on Baby Boomers – many of whom are at retirement age and entering their 70s – to take on the majority of foster caring responsibility.

There is a need for systemic reform to revitalise the foster care system. The child protection system cannot rely on aging empty-nesters, or emerging retirees to carry the bulk of foster care responsibilities, especially acknowledging that children in care often have varied and complex care needs which may pose challenging for carers in their 70s to respond to. Revitalising the foster care system requires a rethink not only of the financial pressures of cost-of-living and the barriers posed by the expense of providing a home for a young person, but also the changing nature of households, how we work and the changing needs of children and young people who are entering care. The demographic insights report noting a number of opportunities to better support foster carers, including increased financial support, increased physical and practical support, greater acknowledgement of foster caring in the workplace to provide for appropriate leave entitlements, and flexibility in the ‘traditional’ foster care approach. The report also acknowledged the opportunity for professionalised models of foster care to better support young people with complex needs to remain in a home-based environment with a carer who has the skills and abilities to not only provide a safe and caring home but also respond appropriately and suitability to their needs.

The system as a ‘Corporate Parent’

Young people in residential care have told us **they feel as though they are being raised as a risk to be managed, rather than a child seeking to be nurtured and loved**. They described the system as lacking genuine care and ongoing emotional support. These reflections are captured in the 2023 report, *I Was Raised by a Checklist*. The title of this report is borrowed directly from these first-hand accounts of ‘corporate parenting’. The report – a collection of conversations with young people in care from across Queensland – is a stark account of the parenting they received by the state. These stories, and others, emphasise a critical need for care that goes beyond meeting basic safety and housing requirements. Children in out-of-home care require emotional support, trust, and, most importantly, people who genuinely care about them as individuals.¹⁴

¹³ Queensland Family and Child Commission, PeakCare (2024). *Preserving a vital system – The future of foster care: Queensland foster carer demographic insights report*. <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-06/Queensland-Foster-Carer-DemographicInsights-Report-PeakCare-June-2024.pdf>

¹⁴ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2023). *I was raised by a checklist*. <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-10/I%20was%20raised%20by%20a%20checklist%20-%20QFCC%20Review%20of%20Residential%20Care.pdf>

The child protection system must shift from the current process-driven and bureaucratic model which leads to children being caught in a cycle of uncertainty affecting their mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing.¹⁵ The system must pivot to an approach that is deeply relational, child-centred, and focused on long-term, holistic outcomes for children where all relevant departments - health, education, justice, housing, and others - align in their approach to supporting children in care. This cross-portfolio approach to corporate parenting was recommended in the *Child Death Review Board Annual Report 2023-2024*^{16,17}, and called for a commitment from each portfolio head regarding their commitment to children in care beyond the core business of each department, and committing to broad whole-of-government coordination to provide a stable upbringing for children in the care of the state.

This recommendation should be considered beyond the local context and should be adopted at a federal level. This would involve each portfolio lead publicly pledging their commitment to children in state care, ensuring that such commitments encompass the full spectrum of child welfare services, including employment, training, and opportunities for young people transitioning to adulthood.

Performance and wellbeing frameworks

Too often, we are caught in discussions over the alignment of national frameworks while children continue to experience substandard care. **Children in care need a parenting model which goes further than 'removing children from risk' but actively raises them through childhood and adolescence.** A unified national approach driven by transparency and accountability would signal commitment from all levels of government to improve the lives of all children in care. The review and re-development of national standards must centre the very human experience of parenting and reflect 'what a good parent would do'.

Many of the current out-of-home care frameworks, including those at the national level, fail to account for the lifelong nature of parenting. For children in care, the impact and role of the state is not temporary; it is lifelong. This must be reflected in the standards and services we provide. Historical methods of government service and program evaluation are not fit-for-purpose or robust enough to provide the role of a parent needed by children who have experienced trauma. The 2021 report, *Rights, Voices, Stories*, and the 2024 report, *A system that cares*, in response to Queensland Child Safety's 'A Roadmap for Residential Care in Queensland', offered performance frameworks with direct input from young people currently living in the out-of-home care system. These performance models adopt the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Young People (ARACY) Nest Wellbeing Framework and provide measurable outcomes across life domains for young people in care, and at multiple system levels within the child protection response, including:

- 1) measures of the impact on an individual child;
- 2) measures relevant to individual houses;
- 3) measures relevant to individual providers (i.e. across their multiple houses);
- 4) regional measures (i.e. across multiple providers and houses in a geographic area); and
- 5) lifetime measures (i.e. outcome measures for young people after leaving residential care).

¹⁵ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2024). *Growing Up in Queensland*. https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-02/9022_QFCC_Growing%20Up%20in%20Queensland.WCAG%20reading%20order_01%20COMPRESSED.pdf

¹⁶ Child Death Review Board (2024). *Annual Report 2023-2024*. <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-02/Child%20Death%20Review%20Board%20Annual%20Report%202023-24.pdf>

¹⁷ **Recommendation 1: Improved cross-government commitment to all children in care.** The Board recommends that the Department of the Premier and Cabinet (DPC) facilitate the publication of commitments from each portfolio Minister or Director-General regarding their commitment to children in state care. This public commitment to children in care should include commitments regarding the core business of the portfolio, as well as broader employment and training, economic and work placement opportunities.

The Nest Wellbeing Framework offers a valuable perspective for understanding the diverse needs of children and young people in care and highlights their development across key domains such as feeling valued, loved and safe, meeting health and education goals, and living authentically within their identity and culture. System performance frameworks must be adaptable to the individual child's needs and reflect the responsibility of the service and government to work towards positive outcomes for all children in care.

System performance measures must be focused on improvement and impact for the child in care. Balancing the need for trauma-informed care with the pressures of maintaining placement stability and meeting institutional requirements can complicate efforts to provide truly child-centred support. While the ARACY Nest Wellbeing Framework advocates for a community-based approach, the complexities of cross-government cooperation and jurisdictional silos often obstruct the integration of services essential for a child's holistic development. As we move forward, it is critical to consider elements of the ARACY framework in a way that acknowledges these challenges, while ensuring the wellbeing of children and young people in care remains the foremost priority.

The role of National Standards

The National Standards must fundamentally create a consistent, child-centred approach that ensures every child and young person in out-of-home care receives the support they need to thrive. National Standards provide a clear, unified framework for delivering high-quality care that prioritises the rights, wellbeing, and long-term development of all children in care. These standards should be used as a tool for guiding practice, ensuring accountability, and improving outcomes for children by setting clear expectations for care providers, including specific practices and approaches to meet individual needs. The standards should aim to achieve better relational permanence, genuine care, emotional support, and the active involvement of children and young people in their own care.

While the national standards must seek consistency, we caution against creating a framework that preferences national uniformity at the expense of the diverse needs of children across states and territories. It is essential that innovation and regional variation in how care is provided is retained and encouraged to serve the unique needs of local populations. National standards can exist alongside jurisdictional flexibility, using common outcomes with bespoke, state-specific indicators to meet the local context.

It should not be required for each jurisdiction to await consensus on every data point of the national standards before taking necessary action to improve responses to, and outcomes for, children in care. Quality care must take precedence over achieving national data consistency. **This should be about a transparent dialogue with the community, government accountability for the raising of thousands of Australian children, and ongoing monitoring of what is actually happening for children in care.**

Accountability mechanisms should be in place to ensure the standards are consistently met, including regular audits, independent reviews, and avenues for children and young people to provide feedback on their care experiences and an emphasis on transparency, where young people are empowered to contribute to decisions that affect their lives. Currently, while the existing standards address many important areas, they often fall short in emphasising the need for relational permanence, emotional support, and genuine connections between care workers and children. Key areas that should be incorporated into the refreshed standards include more comprehensive trauma-informed practices, a stronger focus on relationship-building, and clearer guidelines for creating a sense of "home" for children.

The National Standards must reflect a commitment to respect, dignity, equality, and inclusivity. The standards should prioritise relational connection, consistency, trust, and love, fostering environments where children feel valued as individuals and supported in their journey towards achieving their full potential. These values must be underpinned by a shared commitment to children's wellbeing and the ongoing improvement of care for all children, ensuring that every young person in out of-home care is empowered to succeed. Our children deserve

better than a system that merely checks boxes; they deserve a system that is truly committed to their long-term wellbeing and future success. It is time for a rethinking of corporate parenting that aligns with the full spectrum of child rights, offers transparency, and prioritises the lived experiences of children in care, from their entry into the system and throughout adulthood.

Transition from Care

"When I am asked to reflect and share my transition from out of home care, I can share that I had solid plans, hopes and dreams. Before 18 my transition, although having its moments of absolute fear and moments of crisis, I had enough support around me to say that in the moments leading up to 18, I could conquer my plans, hopes and dreams.

As you would want from any bright-eyed, bushy-tailed teenager - the world was my oyster.

By the time I was 18, I was living independently or in the department's eyes I was self-placing. I had a job, was finishing year 12 and paying rent. Although it was not easy, I made it to my 18th birthday and my journey of adulthood had just begun.

In 2019, I was invited to be the MC and launch the home stretch campaign in Queensland, but what most people don't know, the night before, I had fled a violent situation and was homeless. In the blink of an eye, every plan and dream I had became an unachievable goal.

To me it felt like I had failed adulthood.

Me feeling like I failed my own transition to adulthood was not an uncommon thing, every young adult feels like they failed at some point. The difference here was there was no option for me to "come back" just like my peers around me. I could not run back home, get back on my feet and try again.

That was not an option.

Now I did not do it alone - there were services I could access and I did access them, but it still was a struggle to get back on my feet and moments where it felt impossible.

The art of being an adult takes years to learn.


For one of my siblings, I became a kinship carer, and our support ceased when they turned 18 and financial help ended once they turned 19. By no means the financial reward was not an added bonus, like "here you're raising after your sibling, here's a reward, go buy something nice" but it helped with everything that came with raising a teenager.

I am still in my twenties myself and supporting another teenager is not easy and at times can be costly. I knew what I was signing myself up for and my siblings are lucky, they are always going to have me to run to when things fail for them and I did it because it was the right thing to do, but to be honest it is something I struggle to sustain.

I look at them both and I know, like any parent or adult who has stepped up to be parent knows they are not ready to be fully functioning adults, and I cannot expect them too, you don't magically turn into an adult overnight.

The clock does not strike midnight on their 19th birthday, and they are suddenly able to pay bills, grocery shop and be completely independent.

The reality is if I can't support them, they would be homeless and struggling. Which should not be the goal of any family, but a reality that I am fighting to ensure it does not happen."



This reflection is from a young person – now in their twenties – on their transition out of the Queensland child protection system. It speaks to the fragile footing of transition from care, when acknowledging the trauma of removal from family, the instability experienced in moving between care placements, and the urgency to figure out adulthood as your 18th birthday approaches.

When we think about how a parent should care for their child, the concept of time and age are not normal limitations. **For many people, there is no end date for when your parents will stop caring for you, or for when your children will no longer be able to receive your support.** The concept that a 90-year old parent will still be connected to their 65-year-old child is important and loving and natural. For children who have grown up in the child protection system, the government, which has been the child's legal parent, and the broader funded service system should be available to a care leaver at any age – like any parent would.

'Care', particularly 'parental care' should not end abruptly at any age; changing the end date of State 'care' from 18 to 21 years applies the wrong logic. Certain forms of support, such as access to health, housing and education services, should be provided to care leavers for the rest of their life — much like it will for most children who have grown up with their family of origin.

Over the last three years, the QFCC has spoken with care leavers across Queensland and wrestled with the differences between a natural parent and a 'corporate parent'. Children in state care are removed from their families and raised by the state until they reach an age where the state 'returns' their status to 'normal'. Currently a 30-year-old who grew up in State care is treated no differently to any other 30-year-old — but that non-state care adult generally has their parents for support, whether it be financial, practical, or emotional.

If Australia wished to change life outcomes and social prosperity, any care experienced person, of any age could receive priority access to certain services in recognition of the impact of harm in their childhood, and the particular role government has played in shaping their early lives. Applying this support retrospectively acknowledges the impact of government parenting that led to multiple placements, missed family contact visits, unapproved school excursions and the anxiety of the 'end of care cliff'. Applying this support prospectively would encourage the care system to raise children in the care 'for life' — to focus on their career aspirations, support their hobbies, invest in their world view, develop identity and belonging, and empower independence.