

Telephone: [REDACTED]

Reference: [REDACTED]

Australian Institute of Family Studies

Via email: [REDACTED]

Dear Transition to Independent Living Allowance Review Committee,

Thank you for providing an opportunity to respond to the ongoing review of the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA). I greatly appreciate the focus on improving outcomes for young people transitioning from out-of-home care. This is an area of profound importance, and I welcome the dialogue initiated through this process.

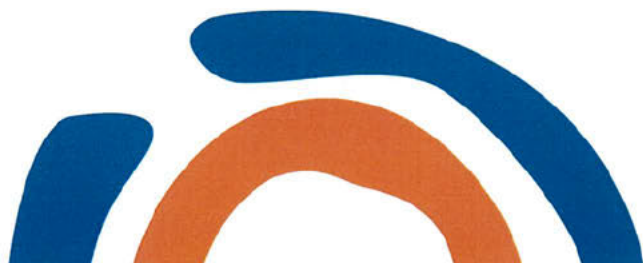
I would like to take this opportunity to express my concerns regarding the current support available via the federal government for children and young people in care. In my view, the federal government does not do enough to provide adequate and sustained support for these vulnerable children. The level of financial assistance and transition support available to young people leaving care, such as through TILA, is insufficient and often underutilised due to a number of barriers that limit access. The TILA is critical in helping care leavers establish themselves independently, yet many young people face significant hurdles, ranging from administrative burden of the application process to the lack of a consistent caseworker or adequate transition support. This is an important issue, and I acknowledge the Australian Institute of Family Studies for leading the consultation.

I attach to this letter a speech by a current 'care leaver' that outlines the human challenges of "leaving care" and the distinction between government support and parental support. I could arrange for you to meet this young person if deemed appropriate.

I have also attached my response to the Out of Home Care National Standards Review¹, which includes further details on these issues and opportunities for improvement. I trust this can inform the broader discussion on enhancing services for children in care. I have also included a speech from a young person who is passionate about this topic. Malakai is a young man who I met during my oversight of the Department of Child Safety review of the residential care system in Queensland. Malakai shared his experiences at the QFCC Residential Care Expert Advisory Council workshops (see my report, *I was raised by a checklist*²) and spoke of the financial strain that young people experience both when living in the out-of-home care system,

¹ Australian Government – Australian Institute of Family Studies (2025). *Refresh of the National Out-of-Home Care Standards. Refresh of the National Out-of-Home Care Standards: Written submission form*

² Queensland Family and Child Commission (2023). *I was raised by a checklist. I was raised by a checklist - QFCC Review of Residential Care*



and when transitioning to independent living. Malaki also spoke at the inaugural QFCC Youth Summit in April 2024; you can watch his speech via our website:

www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/malakai. Malakai's advocacy is a powerful reminder of the impact of policy decisions regarding financial supports for young people, particularly for those exiting the statutory care system and establishing themselves financially with limited other avenues for assistance.

As the Children's Commissioner for Queensland, I am deeply invested in ensuring the wellbeing and successful transition of care leavers into adulthood.

When we think about how a parent should care for their child the concept of time and age are not normal limitations. There is no end date for when my parents will stop caring for me, and there is no age when my children will not be able to receive my 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.

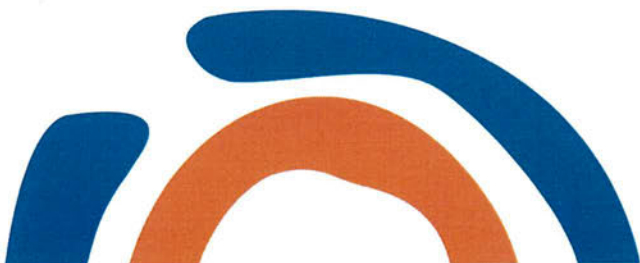
I believe that because the government has been the child's legal parent, it (the government), and the broader funded service system, should be available to a care leaver at any age - like any parent.

'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 my children.

Over the last three years I have 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.

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.

This would not be a new approach for the Australian Government to take. It is not a radical idea and there are existing areas of government where lifetime support is provided – like the



Department of Veterans Affairs. Eligible DVA recipients are able to access support across multiple life domains, and at certain classifications. The support is:

1. clear,
2. regimented and
3. entitlement is automatic.

The comparisons to the DVA scheme are not intended to compare the care experience with military service, or to place value judgements on either cohort – instead it is informative of the way government can design and delivery lifetime support.

Ultimately, young people need support to develop into adults at all stages of their time in out-of-home care, from their earliest entry, through their childhood, and then into their first years as adults. All young adults need care and support as they slowly build stability and independence. Young people in out-of-home care need ongoing help from government, carers and service providers to overcome the particular challenges through their early adult years. Funding for support to the age of 21 years will help this cohort with housing, education, employment and health needs, while helping to provide stability and connection – but ultimately we should ask ourselves is this enough? Wouldn't we expect more of any parent?

I would greatly appreciate being kept informed of the progress of this review and initial outcomes and would welcome the opportunity to be involved in future policy decisions related to the design and implementation of improved services for care leavers.

It is crucial that the review is informed on multiple levels, from individuals with lived and living experience of the care system, the broader community, workers within the statutory system, and state and territory governments, to ensure the final products are practical and sustainable and meet the needs of the young people it is intended to support.

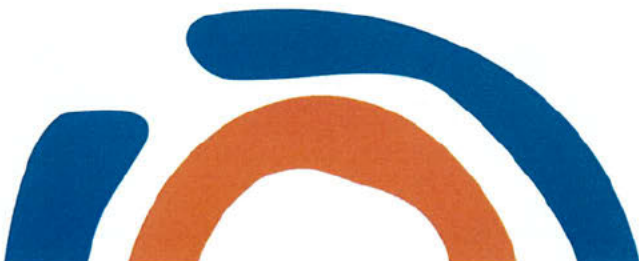
If you have any queries in relation to this matter, please don't hesitate to contact me directly on [REDACTED] or via email at [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Luke Twyford
Principal Commissioner
Queensland Family and Child Commission

12/5 April 2025



The Leaving Care Experience

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. The weight of my situation had not hit me until I was listening to Paul McDonald speech:

"For the child who was in care, tried it ... and it melted down, that they get to come back, just like any young adult does and return to live with the parents"

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. I knew it would be some time before the home stretch campaign would be passed in Queensland, so what Paul was proposing was a dream to me, but knowing that there was a possibility that my siblings or any young person with a care experience would never feel like I did in that moment, was enough for me to continue to advocate for change.

Lots of things have changed since 2019, Support 21 passed in Queensland and the reality that there will be better support for young people with a care experience. Young people will have a chance to go out into the world and succeed and make mistakes like their peers. I look at my siblings, one who is starting their transition to adulthood and one that's smack bang in the middle of it.

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. So the idea that having support even if it was for just an extra year would be an immense help, it would allow me to support them better and also better support themselves throughout their transition to adulthood. 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.

