



PeakCare
Queensland Inc.



ChildProtectionPeak



Queensland
Foster and
Kinship Care

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The Honourable Anastacia Palaszczuk MP
Premier and Minister for Trade
1 William Street
PO Box 15185
City East QLD 4002

18th December 2019

Dear Premier

Re: Giving all our young people in care a good start

A collective of the key Queensland child protection peak bodies and representative groups – PeakCare Queensland Incorporated (PeakCare), Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP), the CREATE Foundation and Queensland Foster and Kinship Care (QFKC) – acknowledge the initiatives commenced by your Government in supporting the transition of young people in care into adulthood. As this year draws to a close, we offer our services in further collaborating with your Government and its agencies in the new year to build on these initiatives and establish the best possible means for giving young people in care a good start at adulthood.

Our organisations are united in commending your Government for its inclusion of ‘Giving all our children a good start’ as one of the *Advancing Queensland’s Priorities*. As you will appreciate, the vast majority of young people who have, for various reasons, been removed from their parents’ care have often not had a good start at childhood, and it is therefore incumbent upon our society to ensure that they have a different experience of their start at adulthood. Moreover, with cognizance given to the inter-generational contact of families with the child protection system, supporting these young people in their transition to adulthood will help to break this cycle and ensure that their children are given a better start at life than the one they received.

Support given to these young people will, of course, also have relevance to the achievement of other priority areas, namely keeping Queenslanders healthy, keeping communities safe and creating jobs in a strong economy which includes the engagement of more young Queenslanders in education, training and work.

We especially acknowledge steps undertaken by your Government in:

- amending the *Child Protection Act* to incorporate provisions to support young people who have left care up to the age of 25, although we would prefer that these provisions were strengthened by framing young people’s access to these supports as their entitlement
- strengthening the focus placed on planning young people’s transition to adulthood from the age of 15

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- facilitating enhanced collaboration across government departments to allow for the introduction of education and training, employment and housing initiatives to support young adults who have left care
- increasing financial investment in *Next Steps Plus*, noting that non-government providers of this program, whilst welcoming the broadening of eligibility criteria for accessing its services, are concerned that the subsequent anticipated increase in demand will not be covered by the additional funding that is being made available
- extending carer allowance payments to foster and kinship carers up until young people in their care turn 19 years of age, and
- committing to the development of Government policy directions that are informed by the views held by young people who have had a lived experience of transitioning from care, as canvassed by the CREATE Foundation.

With young people from the general population increasingly remaining resident with their families and drawing on their support well into their twenties, the State is obliged to reflect these standards and act as any good parent would in maintaining the care and support of young people for whom it has exercised a corporate parenting responsibility.

Our view is that the initiatives already introduced by your Government demonstrate a sound commitment to meeting these obligations and serve as a highly effective platform for further reform that will improve the outcomes that can be achieved for young people who have been in care.

National Home Stretch Campaign

You may be aware that, in recent years, a national *Home Stretch Campaign* was initiated by Anglicare Victoria for purposes of extending care until young people turn 21. Versions of the campaign have been running in various States and Territories with a mix of results. These range from commitments made by the South Australian and Tasmanian Governments to extend care to 21 for young people living in foster or kinship care through to a trial of extending care to 21 for a limited number of young people in Western Australia and an extension of care to 21 for 250 young people leaving care over five years in Victoria. Two States (Tasmania and South Australia) have indicated that work is being undertaken to adapt their extension of care models to also cater for young people who have been living in residential care.

The *Home Stretch Campaign* draws on the experiences of other countries where care and various support services have been extended to young people until the age of 21 or, in some instances, up to around 25 years of age. These countries include the United States (46 states), England (the 'Staying Put' scheme), Scotland, Northern Ireland ('Going the Extra Mile' scheme), Wales ('When I'm Ready' scheme), Canada, Sweden, Germany, Portugal and New Zealand. Notably, New Zealand has designed its scheme to be accessible to young people who both remain with or return to their carers after periods of living elsewhere. Research including, in particular, a Deloitte Access Economics Analysis completed in 2016, is used to argue the cost and social benefits of extending care within Australia, including projected reductions in homelessness (39% to 19.5%), teenage pregnancy (16.6% to 10.2%), arrests (16.3% to 10.4%), alcohol and drug dependence (15.8% to 2.5%), mental illness (54.4% to 30.8%) and hospitalisation (29.2% to 19.2%), and increased engagement in education (3.6% to 9%).

Queensland Home Stretch Campaign

On 28th November 2019, the Queensland *Home Stretch Campaign* was launched in Brisbane. In an address delivered by Mr Lindsay Wegener, PeakCare's Executive Director and Co-Chair of Queensland's Campaign Steering Committee, views shared by our organisations about the objectives of the Queensland Campaign were clearly stated. They include the enabling of Queensland's foster and kinship carers to continue the care they have been providing for young people beyond the age of 19 years, whenever this serves these young people's best interests. The Queensland campaign seeks to achieve an acknowledgement that continuation of the small amounts of financial assistance provided to carers can often make the difference between whether or not a young person is able to be supported in engaging in tertiary study or their pursuit of other ambitions, or simply remain in the care of a family with whom they have formed a stable, trusting and loving relationship. No foster or kinship carer should be faced with the gut-wrenching choice of having to end their care of a young person because it is no longer affordable for them to continue their relationship, or to impose limitations on young people's educational prospects or other aspirations they may hold for reasons of financial costs.

Our shared understanding of the *Home Stretch Campaign* is that it is not intended to make the support provided to young people contingent upon them remaining in foster or kinship care or compel them in any way to remain with their carers if they do not wish to or have not, for a range of complex reasons, enjoyed a positive experience of living with their carers.

Nor should it be a campaign that is intended to benefit only those young people who have been living in foster or kinship care. Its purpose must also be to ensure that young people who have been living in residential care or have had no fixed place of abode can similarly benefit from the opportunities provided to them in supporting their transition to adulthood.

Our commitment to the introduction of an enhanced, flexible range of individualised supports

Our organisations are committed to the establishment of a range of highly individualised supports that can be made available to all young people in care who are transitioning to adulthood, with the extension of financial assistance to foster and kinship carers being one of a range of strategies that should be made available when needed. This may take the form of an extension of carer allowances until young people in their care reach 21 years of age, or in some instances, be received by carers in the form of board paid by young people who are, in a more age-appropriate manner and in recognition of their growing maturity, financially assisted to contribute to the costs of their household on their own behalf.

In addition to seeking further investment in *Next Steps Plus* to ensure that the funding provided matches the level of demand for this service and continued development of the education and training, employment and housing initiatives commenced by your Government, our organisations hold particular concerns for certain cohorts of young people for whom added, specialised support may be required. They include, but are not limited to:

- young people with physical disabilities, cognitive impairment and/ or emerging mental health concerns who face particular challenges in their transition to adulthood and are especially vulnerable to sexual, emotional and financial exploitation by adults
- young women who are pregnant or have become mothers either prior to or soon after leaving care, and young men who have become fathers either prior to or soon after leaving care
- young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who, after leaving care, are in need of support to establish or renew connections with their families, communities, countries and cultures, especially when these connections have been disrupted by their entry into care
- young people, both male and female, who are engaged in intimate relationships commenced whilst in care or after leaving care, that involve them experiencing and/ or using violence, for whom both the child protection and the domestic and family violence service systems struggle to provide an adequate response
- young people in need of ongoing legal advice, representation or advocacy after leaving care due to their encounters with the criminal justice system or who are required to deal with a range of other complex legal matters often associated with the cessation of their guardianship and custody arrangements
- young people who, either by choice or a lack of alternative options, re-unite with their families in circumstances where, without proper support being provided, may encounter unresolved family conflicts, complex family dynamics or other adverse circumstances that may jeopardise the safety and well-being of these young people and other family members, and
- young people who, due to their inability to obtain a 'blue card' upon turning 18 years of age, may be required to leave their carers' household, against the wishes of both these young people and their carers.

Beyond these very complex matters, as listed above, that young people in care often encounter in their transition to adulthood, there is the usual array of challenges faced by all young people during this stage of their lives – their engagement in study or vocational training, obtaining employment and an income, locating affordable housing, their engagement in the 'rocky road' of forming, maintaining and ending intimate relationships, and their discovery and pursuit of various lifestyle options. The enormity of these challenges is compounded for young people leaving care when their access to familiar and trusted adults and networks upon whom they may have relied for guidance and support is disrupted.

A statement of your commitment

At this stage, we are seeking a public statement of your Government's commitment to placing prioritised attention on further responding to the needs of young people in care who are transitioning to adulthood.

Our organisations collectively offer our services to work collaboratively with your Government and its various departments all of which have a shared responsibility to develop and introduce the best possible, evidence-based range of strategies, building on the initiatives already commenced. This

offer is made with a view to a case being developed for these strategies receiving proper consideration in the formulation of the next State Budget.

We would, of course, welcome any queries and further discussion about the matters raised within this letter.

Yours sincerely



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