



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Calls for support to children in state care to be extended to age 21**

*Most children aren't prepared for adulthood the moment they reach the age of 18; why should it be different for young people in state care?*

Children are not just small people waiting to be adults; they are full and complete versions of themselves at their particular stage in life, and they are to be nurtured and supported on the basis that they ought to flourish at every stage of their lives. Childhood is a unique and very integral stage of the life course that is rich, meaningful and just as important as adulthood.

When children come in to state care, it is assumed that once they reach the age of eighteen they are prepared for their adulthood. State responsibility for their wellbeing ceases, and they are largely on their own to make sense of adulthood and the newfound 'adult' world around them.

How realistic is this expectation however in a modern society where we know that children's brain development and their capacity take full responsibility for their actions is only finalized when they are about 25, they are staying at home for longer, relying on the financial support of their parents for longer, are taking longer to reach their educational goals and are largely unequipped to support themselves in a world that many have been 'priced out of'?

For kids in state care, leaving care at the age of eighteen is unrealistic. To force young people to stand on their own feet and draw upon their own resources at such a formative stage of their early lives belies the modern difficulties of transitioning to adulthood. We don't expect other children in family environments to leave home until their mid to late twenties, and yet we expect that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people should have the skills to flourish the second that they turn eighteen.

CAFWA and SACOSS were delighted to see the Liberal Party of South Australia announcing its policy to continue to support foster and kinship carers to support kids in state care until the age of 21. We hope that all political parties quickly follow this example. We know that a relatively small investment which better supports young people in care to transition to early adulthood will far outweigh the costs to our social welfare system when they are simply forced to fend for themselves once they turn eighteen. Supporting and allowing foster and kinship carers to keep children with them until they turn 21 is likely to significantly alter the life trajectory of the young person concerned and makes it less likely that they will end up homeless or in contact with the criminal justice system. It is also necessary to provide the option of continued support to the age of 21 to all children who have been in the child protection system that may have included residential or emergency care.

In the context of the current South Australian Child Protection System Reform, Commissioner Margaret Nyland has recognized the need for children and young people to have access to support past the age of 18 whereby they are currently deemed to be adults and fully capable of complete independence.

In her final report released in August 2016, she suggests that ‘...very few young people received support from the agency [Families SA] after they turned 18...Amendments to the Children’s Protection Act are required to enable the state, in appropriate cases, to help care leavers up to the age of 25.’

Nyland further suggests that ‘...Some children are fortunate enough to be able to remain with their long term foster parents or kinship carers after they reach the age of 18 and have the benefit of their support while they pursue training and educational opportunities. In such situations, changes to carer support payments should be made to help young people to study or undertake a course of training while they remain at home.’ (Nyland: 2016)

CAFWA strongly supports the specific recommendations made in the Nyland Report that relate to the support of young people in state care past the age of 18. These include –

**Recommendation 158:** Amend the Children’s Protection Act 1993 to require the Minister to provide or arrange assistance to care leavers aged between 18 and 25 years;

**Recommendation 161:** Continue to make modified payments to foster and kinship carers where the care leaver is engaged in tertiary education, apprenticeship, or any post-high school training, and where their best interests would be served by remaining in foster or kinship care until the qualification is completed;

**Recommendation 162:** Review the Rapid Response policy to identify opportunities to expand priority services to care leavers up to the age of 25;

**Recommendation 168:** Fund Housing SA to develop innovative housing models, particularly those that use supported share housing where appropriate for care leavers;

**Recommendation 169:** Fund a pilot program of intensive case management assistance for vulnerable care leavers, to be delivered by an agency with established relationships with vulnerable children in care; and

**Recommendation 171:** Make a significant injection of funds into post-care services currently provided by Relationships Australia, to enable these to be delivered more flexibly and more assertively.

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