# *Next Step Plus – Enhancing Transition from Care*

# 2019-20 Budget Outcomes

The Queensland Government has approved an enhancement to funding for Next Step of $2.5 million over the next three years.

This brings the total funding to Next Step to approximately $4.75 million per annum.

## What is “Next Step”?

Transitioning to adulthood can be a difficult and challenging period in the lives of all young people, regardless of whether they have a care experience.

While some young people go on to enjoy a successful adulthood, research has found this is not the experience for the majority of those who have had a care experience, as a result of instability, fewer natural supports, lack of family and cultural connections, and the effects of past trauma.

Next Step After Care is a state-wide service funded by the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women to provide support to young people aged 15-25 in their transition from care to adulthood.

The service is a collaborative initiative delivered by a group of four funded non‑government organisations, under the leadership of Life Without Barriers.

Next Step provides vital supports for young people who have left care, including:

* managing money and entitlements
* finding somewhere to stay and the ins and outs of housing and accommodation
* training, jobs and preparing a resume
* keeping safe, strong and healthy
* relationships, including friends and family
* legal advice.

Next Step delivers a range of targeted services, practical support and crisis assistance via:

* a state-wide Connections program accessed online
* 1800 number for information, referral and support for telephone support
* tailored Individual Support available at 10 locations across Queensland
* brokerage funds.

The Next Step vision is for young people with a care experience to have access to support that enables them to:

* develop maturity, skills and connections needed to successfully participate as adult members of society
* have safe and enduring connections with community and culture
* pursue education, training and employment goals, and
* achieve hopes and dreams.

In October 2018, amendments to the *Child Protection Act* commenced that enable continuing support to young people with a care experience to the age of 25 years.

The Government has already announced the extension of foster and kinship care allowances in 2019 for children turning 18 during year 12, to allow them to stay with their carer and complete school.

## What has been approved?

New funding will commence from early 2020 to coincide with the rollout of the redesigned Next Step Plus program.

This is being developed in collaboration with children and young people, current Next Step providers, peak bodies, and other agencies and stakeholders.

Next Step Plus will feature stronger partnerships with other government, community and corporate entities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations.

Investment will continue in the Strengthening Health Assessment Pathways project with Queensland Health and Primary Health Networks. Two new locations for the Navigate Your Health pilot will be established to help better connect young people to the health supports they need before they exit care.

Next Step Plus will also complement improved pathway planning with the Department of Housing and Public Works. This will ensure young people transitioning to adulthood can access safe and affordable housing so that they can focus on their education and securing a job, rather than worrying about where they’ll sleep that night.

## Why more investment?

Young people leaving care deserve similar supports to those that most parents provide their own children when they transition to adulthood.

In late 2017, Griffith University finalised an evaluation of Next Step, which found the service provided valuable support to young people in their transition from care, but could be improved through:

* greater focus on culturally safe and responsive support
* more assertive outreach to vulnerable young people
* greater matching of services to the needs of most disadvantaged young people who are least likely to have ongoing support
* better integration with Child Safety and to form connections with young people as they turn 15.

## How will this support young people in care?

Next Step is being redesigned in response to these findings, and the extension of eligibility for support from 21 to 25 years of age in line with changes to the *Child Protection Act 1999* in 2018.

The redesign and funding enhancement will ensure help and guidance is available for young people who do not have strong adult support networks when they transition from care.

The redesign will pay particular attention to the critical gaps identified through the evaluation so that young people who have been in care are able to achieve greater life outcomes.

## How will this initiative be implemented?

The redesign process will take place in mid-2019. Recommissioning of Next Step is expected to be complete by the end of 2019

Greater emphasis will be placed on partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations and mainstream services so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young peoples, who make up approximately 40 per cent of children and young people in care, have access to more culturally responsive services.

The new service, Next Step Plus, will commence in early 2020.