Young people who leave approved OOHC placements to stay in other locations: Access to transition planning and support

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Acknowledgement of Country

The University of Queensland (UQ) acknowledges the Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which we meet.

We pay our respects to their Ancestors and their descendants, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country.

We recognise their valuable contributions to Australian and global society.



What is this program of research about?



Out-of-home care

(Foster, kinship, residential care)

Leave without approval



AWOL

eloping

Runaway

Absconder

missing

escapee



'Self-placing'

(unapproved locations such as sleeping rough, couch surfing with family, friends or strangers)

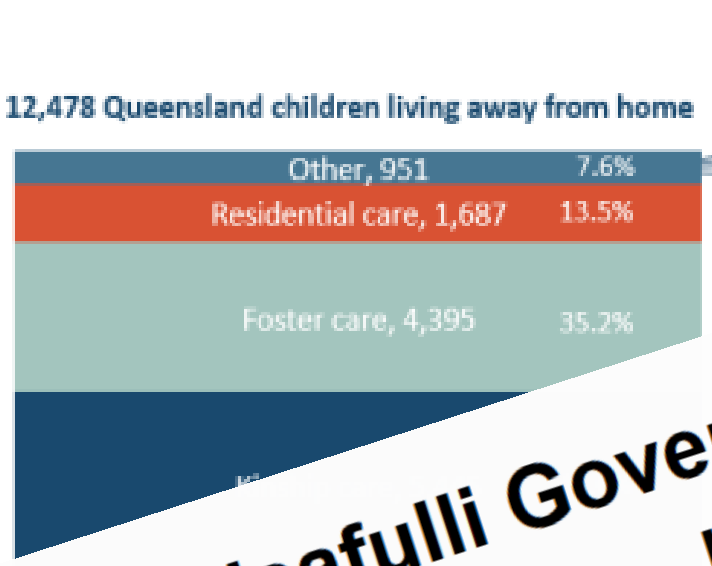
all contested terms!

No reliable (inter)national picture

Substantial individual, societal and economic consequences

Limited evidence re motivations for, pathways and needs of, and effective responses to young people who self-place

Individual risk factors + relational and contextual factors



Within this group of 951 children there were:

67 in a detention centre

37 living independently

9 in a watchhou

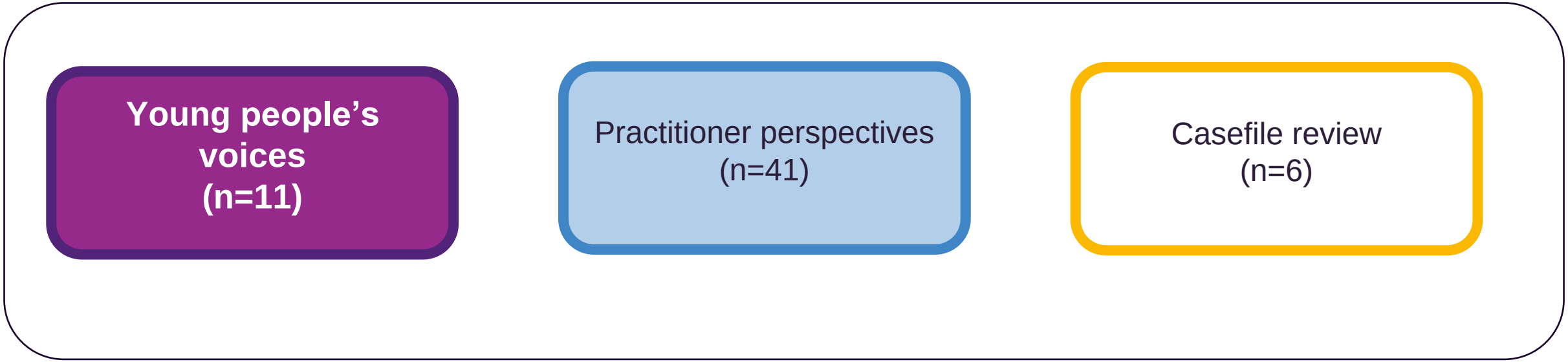
Crisafulli Government acts following Census on missing kids in care



- Queensland-first Census into self-placing children finds 51 of the 772 children missing were young offenders out on bail, and 27 of the children absent or missing from care were under 12.
- The Census exposes an issue the former Labor Government ignored, which put some of Queensland's most vulnerable children and the community at risk.
- The Crisafulli Government will trial embedding child safety officers with police at three sites to strengthen information sharing between Queensland Police Service, Youth Justice and Child Safety.
- The Crisafulli Government is delivering safety where you live by preventing crime and keeping young people on the right track.

Yet, [illegible] survey (n=325) found that 33% of young[illegible]being absent from their OOHC placement for [illegible]over one week in the previous year

Pilot study


Young people's voices (n=11)
Practitioner perspectives (n=41)
Casefile review (n=6)

Young people – pseudonyms & demographics

Pseudonym	Age at interview (years)	Age when 1st self-placed (years)	Current child protection order	Current living arrangement
Zana	16	14	Yes	Residential care
Maly	16	14	Yes	Supported Independent Living
Jaiden	18	15	No	Boarding house
Esme	15	12	Yes	Living with parents (unapproved)
Indy	18	15	No	Living with parents
Sophia	13	13	Yes	Living with family friends (unapproved)
Jedda	18	15	No	Supported Independent Living
Keira	17	15	Yes	Living with partner's family (unapproved)
Allira	18	11	No	Public housing
Talia	17	16	Yes	Living with kin (unapproved)
Koen	16	13	Yes	Living with previous carer (unapproved)

Practitioner demographics

Item	Characteristics of participant	CPA (n=26)	NGO (n=17)
Highest Qualification	None	1	1
	Certificate/Diploma	1	1
	Bachelor degree	18	10
	Master degree	2	5
	Missing data	4	0
Length of time working in OOHC	<5 years	7	13
	5-9 years	7	2
	10-19 years	5	1
	≥20 years	4	1
	Missing data	3	0
Sex	Male	6	5
	Female	20	12
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Status	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	0	0
	Non-Indigenous	23	17
	Missing data	3	0

Implications for transition planning and support

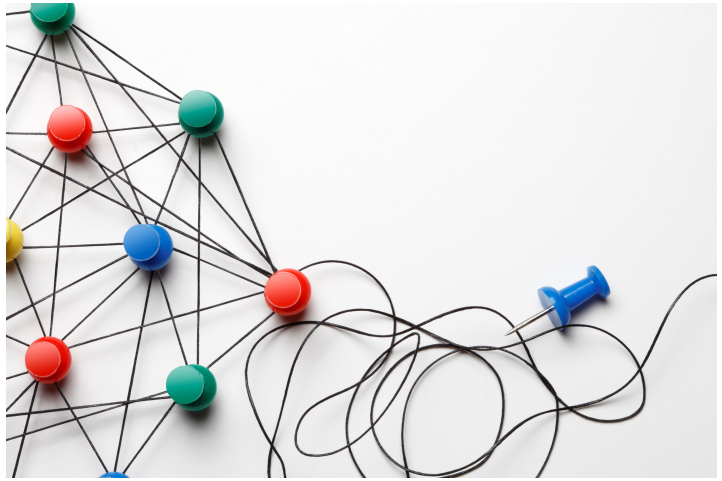


Open access via Australian Journal of Social Issues.

Venables et al. (2025).

Our guiding questions

For young people under child protection orders, how does self-placing shape:



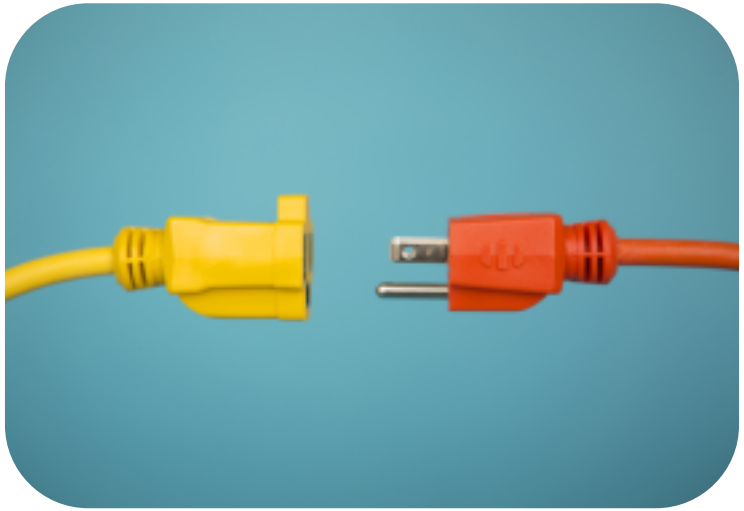
- young people’s access to transition planning and support?

- practitioners’ ability to provide transition support?

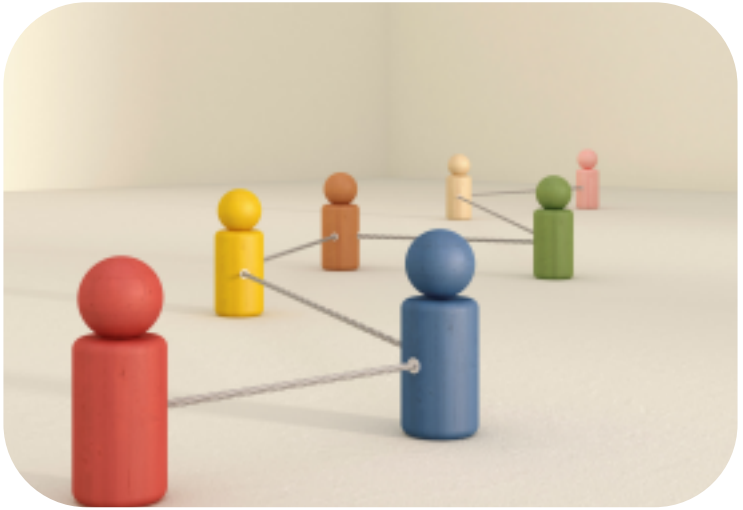
“risk of poor life outcomes… because it is really harder for them to re-engage with any type of education or employment, harder for them to live in a home and on and on it goes (CPA_FG7)



Instability when self-placing compounds vulnerability



Disconnection from formal support during key transition



The need for responsive supports



Disconnection from formal support

PERCEPTION THAT DISCONNECTION ALSO PERPETUATED BY:

- "**sheer workloads**" that make it "**hard to do the type of practice they would like to do"**
- CPA practitioners who see self-placing as **"rebellion"** and have punitive attitudes towards young people → **"you refuse to take a placement so figure your shit out"** (NGO_FG3)

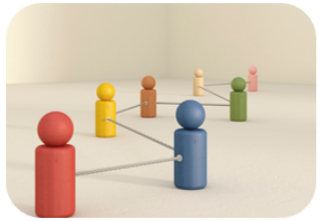
COMPRESSED TRANSITION PLANNING

View that transition planning compressed into the weeks before 18th birthday

"there's **nothing set up** [for transition]…all the work was just targeted around their immediate safety…there was just no scope for anything else" (CPA_FG4).

Young people, who were already nervous about turning 18 shared the impact:

"I've been in Child Safety for 15-years and leaving [transition tasks] to the last minute was not the best thing to do"- Jedda.



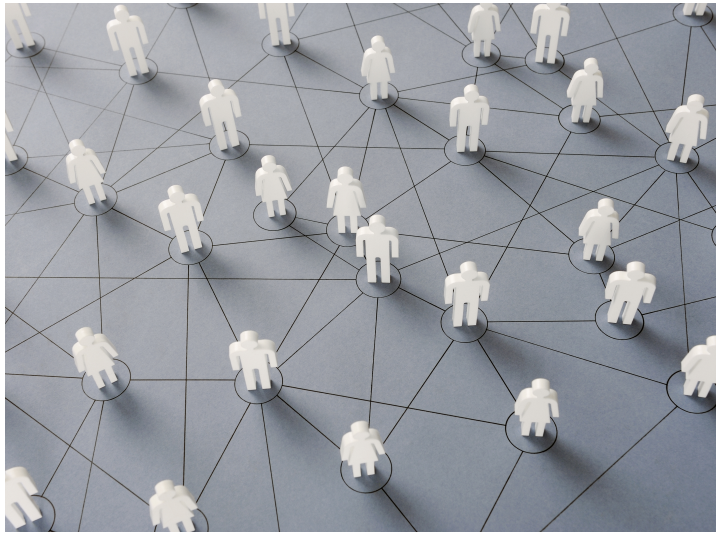
Need for responsive support

Recognition that appropriately supported self-placing could have a positive impact on transition…

A young person lived in a residential, she was engaging in criminal activity, substance misuse, I think she was the age of 16, they put her in a [SIL] placement, she didn't really cope with that whole situation or engaging with the other tenants, **she decided to self-place, get her own independent accommodation**. She's in TAFE now…she's getting her driver's license…she's thriving. (CPA_ FG6)

Networks beyond the CPA

Role that non-statutory organisations can play by 'responding differently'



…and punitive worker attitudes can limit the resources provided:

"because it's about making sure that [YPwSP] has access and the independence, not actually promoting this co-dependency [on the CPA]" (CPA_FG1)

Thoughts…

Responsive support → means we need to better understand young people's pathways

Transition from care to adulthood even more compressed and abrupt than their peers in OOHC

Inappropriate OOHC placements (resi) are key trigger for disruption, disconnection and subsequent impacts on transition

Self-placing when appropriately resourced may support young people's transition → but system 'default' does not support this

Positive relationships with trusted adults can help young people to (re)connect with formal support

Crucial to find ways for young people to reconnect so that they don't also miss out on new extended care supports