

Cohort 04 of 08

From Care to Home: Young Adults 16–25 Leaving Out-of-Home Care

A campus integrating independent housing, mentoring, U-Space creative expression, and the KITen animal programme: designed to end the cliff edge care leavers face at 18.

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Care Leavers · 16–25 · KITen Model · U-Space · Mentoring · No Cliff Edge

The Cliff Edge

Young people leaving out-of-home care face a transition no other young person in Australia faces: at 18, the support structures of the care system largely withdraw, and the young person is expected to manage independent living, employment, education, and social connection simultaneously, often with a history of trauma, attachment disruption, and multiple placement moves behind them. CREATE Foundation research has found that around 30 per cent of young people experience homelessness within their first year of leaving care (McDowall, 2020).

"Care-leavers do not age out of needing a family. They age out of having one."

ZONE 1 · RESIDENTIAL: INDEPENDENCE WITH A NET

- 24 self-contained studio and 1-bed units: genuine independent tenancies, real tenancy rights
- Fully furnished on arrival including bedding, cookware, basic pantry
- Pets permitted: KITen partner animals (shelter animals) prioritised for resident matching
- Tenancy extends beyond 25: no automatic move-on at age boundary

- Communal kitchen on each floor: designed to be used together, not just privately
- Welfare check protocol: if no contact in 48 hours, peer staff (not police) initiates check

ZONE 2 · COMMUNITY HUB: IDENTITY AND BELONGING

- Mentoring programme: each new resident matched with a mentor; not a caseworker, a person who shows up
- U-Space creative writing and expression workshops: weekly, facilitated by artists with lived experience
- Education support: TAFE enrolment, university pathways, literacy and numeracy; non-judgmental, at-pace
- Cultural identity programme: First Nations, CALD, LGBTIQ+; specific programming for specific identities
- Celebration infrastructure: birthdays acknowledged, milestones celebrated, holidays available
- Alumni network: young people who have moved on can return, visit, mentor; continuity of relationship

THE KITEN ANIMAL PROGRAMME

- Partnerships sought with animal welfare organisations: shelter animals for fostering or adoption
- Animal care training provided. Communal animal lounge in hub.
- Veterinary costs subsidised: financial barrier to pet ownership removed
- Therapeutic animal visiting programme: partner shelter animals visit campus weekly
- Animal fostering recognised as community contribution by resident council
- KITen model: mutual rescue; displaced young person and displaced animal, each providing the other with a home

Population Profile

Age range	16–25 primary (tenancy continues beyond 25)
Homelessness risk	Around 30% homeless within a year of leaving care (CREATE, 2020)
OOHC in NSW	About 13,800 children and young people (December 2024)
Aboriginal children	46% of children in out-of-home care in NSW
Unit mix	16 studio, 6 × 1-bed, 2 accessible: 24 total

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