



CASE STUDY

Sara's story

Sara was fostered when she was quite young and spent many years in her caring, secure home with her foster parents. Sara was so much a part of the family that they chose to change her surname to theirs to make her feel more connected to their family.

Many years later the parents went through a difficult period and decided to separate. The mother left and made no contact and the father met someone new. Sara, now 16 years old, remained with her foster father but the relationship began to strain under the pressure of the new household. Her world began to unravel.

Sara's foster father eventually made the choice that she could no longer stay in the house. Another foster family helped Sara for a few weeks and now she floats between her friends' houses. In the right environment and with the right supports Sara could achieve independence and life skills but at this point in time, she is just trying to find a place to sleep and someone to support her.

Sara's situation is not uncommon. Twenty-two per cent of care leavers are likely to be in temporary housing such as caravans and refuges compared to 0.6 per cent of their peers. Research also shows that young people moving from foster care into independent living have some of the poorest life outcomes of any group in the community, with one third of care leavers unemployed (or looking for work).

Of these, half are in the juvenile justice system and nearly one third face teenage pregnancy.

While many young people transition to adulthood with the support and love of their parents, “[i]n contrast, many young people leaving state out-of-home care experience rapid, uneven and compressed transitions to adulthood whereby they have to attain independent housing; leave school; move into further education, training or employment; and in some cases become a parent - all at the same time, and at a much younger age than their peers.” (*Family Matters No. 89, 2011, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Australian Government*)

There are also those who still receive Government funding, but whose foster care situation has broken down and they are too young to be fully independent.

