Self-determined housing choices for young people leaving the care system in Aotearoa New Zealand
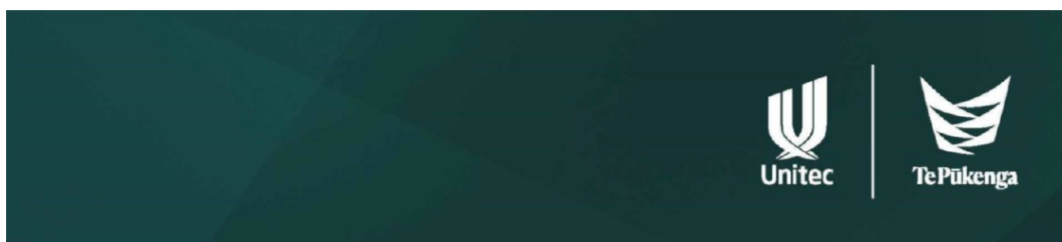

Brook James Turner

DECLARATION

Declaration

Name of candidate: Brook James Turner

This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project entitled: Self-determined housing choices for young people leaving the care system in Aotearoa New Zealand.

is submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of Masters in Applied Practice (Social Practice).

Principal Supervisor: **Helen Gremillion**

CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I confirm that:

- This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project represents my own work;
- The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.
- Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.
  Research Ethics Committee Approval Number: 2020-1003

Candidate Signature: ………………………………………… Date: July 4ᵗʰ 2022

Student number: 1350578

Tangata ako ana i te kāenga,
te tūranga ki te marae, tau ana
A person nurtured in the community
contributes strongly to society

ABSTRACT

This thesis documents the self-determined housing preferences of ten young people (aged 18-22) leaving the care system in New Zealand. Globally, care leavers are acknowledged as some of the most vulnerable youth, especially to patterns of housing instability and homelessness. Despite this, limited evidence is available in New Zealand regarding care leavers' housing experiences, although comparable international data exists. Adopting a constructivist lens, the study utilises photovoice, photo-elicitation, and semi-structured interviewing to capture young people's representations and narratives of preferred accommodation. The data was analysed using thematic analysis, and offers the reader rich visual and verbal accounts of care leavers' housing journeys. The researcher upheld strengths-based youth development principles throughout the project, ensuring a democratic and equitable exchange with participants and prioritising the voices of young people.

The findings indicate the importance of stability and permanence for care leavers in post-care accommodation by documenting and analysing multiple stories of unstable and insecure living immediately after care. In their stories, participants raised concerns about their readiness to navigate independent living within short transition timeframes, and indicated a desire to receive tailored support alongside stable housing, ideally from a workforce with lived experience transitioning out of care. Most care leavers expressed a reluctance to return to their families of origin as their initial accommodation option, although several rangatahi Māori voiced a yearning resonant with a desire to be housed amongst Hapū and Iwi. In an unexpected finding, many participants sought connections to nature as part of their preferred home environment. Participants were also particularly interested in independent living arrangements, and communicated significant resistance to being housed in close proximity to other vulnerable youth, providing evidence that alternative housing options to the current (congregate) supported accommodation model should be considered. Taken together, these findings present a compelling and urgent case for policymakers to focus their attention on care leaver housing options and support for this cohort's independent living. Further research is needed in order to understand the scale of care leaving housing needs in New Zealand, how many care leavers exit care only to fall into housing instability, and what specific cultural considerations need to be addressed in post-care housing for rangatahi Māori.

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CHAPTER ONE: THESIS INTRODUCTION

1.1   General Situation

The role of accommodation and housing stability for youth leaving care has been largely ignored in the New Zealand context. Despite young people from care being deemed one of society's most vulnerable groups, support for housing as they exit the care system has remained unaddressed and inadequately resourced for decades. While there has been a broad and wide consensus amongst child welfare experts regarding the vulnerabilities and complexities of youth exiting care in New Zealand, very limited attention has been given in legislation, research, or practise to the importance and choice of appropriate housing as youth journey out of care and on to independent living.

What we do know is that approximately 600 eligible youth begin an 'out of home care' journey each year, and yet fewer than one hundred and fifty beds are made available by the state for supporting this group into independent living (Malatest International, 2021). Without the adequate support and housing supply to respond to the needs being presented, prolonged housing instability after care is a distinct possibility.

The lack of housing support in place at this current juncture leaves Oranga Tamariki (New Zealand's Ministry for Children) in the precarious situation of regularly exiting young people from care into situations of housing insecurity. Although the intention is to place care leavers back with their family of origin, in many cases these environments are no more suitable for the young person at their point of transition than they were when they were uplifted from these environments years earlier. Conflicts will inevitably occur between youth and their family leading to immediate vulnerabilities around housing. With a habit of rushed exits based on an arbitrary age of graduation, care leavers can find themselves in unsupported and inadequate living circumstances within weeks of leaving the care system. Furthermore, the lack of policy development and action by decision-makers inevitably contributes to negative outcomes for one of our most vulnerable groups. Having experienced a history of movement and unstable living circumstances, care leavers can lose what limited social

networks they formed in care, and spiral into episodes of homelessness, mental health distress, and an increased number of interactions with the justice system (Broad, 1996).

The researcher brings to this thesis project a highly relevant practitioner history. As a youth development professional, he has focused solely on creating opportunities for youth to experience a brighter future in a range of contexts including the creative arts, sports, education, employment, and housing. Yet during this period, there has not been a single year when he has not witnessed or engaged with young people in unstable housing circumstances, a situation that is most common amongst those with a care history. He has advocated to government agencies for young people to be given appropriate accommodation and support, taken youth on as flatmates, supported youth on the streets with street-based youth work initiatives, and worked with child welfare agencies to mentor teens leaving care. The researcher's current employer is Visionwest Community Trust where he holds an executive position that includes service development responsibilities across both youth and housing programmes.

To respond to the housing challenges care leavers face, this thesis articulates and explores their perspectives and aspirations for housing options once they age out of the care system. Using a constructivist paradigm and the methods of photovoice, photo-elicitation, and semi-structured interviews, the researcher has given a group of care leavers the opportunity to share personal thoughts on their housing needs and desires. As a result, the researcher hopes to offer insights from care leavers which will influence decision-makers to bring about a change in their current approach to housing. By listening to the housing journeys of care leavers, the researcher seeks to elevate and amplify their voices, revealing insights that, if implemented, stand to improve their post-care experiences.

1.2   Rationale for the Research

The research topic has been chosen in response to the limited number, and general scarcity, of youth housing solutions for care leavers in New Zealand, and the lack of local research addressing these issues. Globally, failed transitions for care leavers have been linked to feeding long-term homeless populations across Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. There is also an emerging evidence base that elevates accommodation as one of the highest priorities for care leavers. Undoubtedly, housing plays a

critical role in enabling stable and supported transitions out of care. However, specific evidence on the importance of housing for care leavers in New Zealand is limited. With minimal research on the housing needs of care leavers available at the present time, there is a call from youth workers and child advocates to understand the housing needs of care leavers in greater detail. To do so requires a review and analysis of a range of international studies and reports that are easier to come by than any local studies. Many of these studies are covered in detail later in this thesis.

Anecdotally, care leavers in New Zealand do not seem to fare any better than care leavers in other jurisdictions. As Cleaver (2016) notes:

> The New Zealand government has not funded any studies into care leaving, however there are a number of nongovernment funded studies, particularly some New Zealand qualitative studies of care leavers' experiences and a vast amount of international literature on the subject of care leavers' needs and barriers to success post-care all reporting issues in New Zealand of homelessness, mental health needs, poverty and unemployment consistent with international research (p. 24).

Currently, efforts to meet youth housing demands in New Zealand remain severely under-resourced, despite the volume of need voiced by practitioners across the country. The cohort at greatest risk remains young people from care who are regularly discharged by the state with limited post-care support in place. Especially noteworthy is the lack of access to appropriate housing.

The transition to independence is initiated by a birthday graduation that automatically pronounces a young person to be ready and prepared to exit the care system. This assumption fails to recognise each individual's unique circumstances, level of maturity, and readiness to face the challenges of independent living (Baker, 2017).

Every year, throughout Auckland, youth housing providers receive hundreds of requests from the city's young people who, after a life in care, are left in motels with little support or stability. In general, New Zealand is lacking a comprehensive housing solution for youth leaving care. By engaging care leavers and discovering their self-determined views on housing, this research has provided findings that demonstrate what changes could be made to respond to the expressed needs of the youth requiring post-care accommodation support.

1.3   Aim of the Research

The aim of this thesis is to explore and identify self-determined housing options for young people who have transitioned out of state care. The researcher engaged care leavers on the role and importance of accommodation in their transition out of care, documenting their housing journey so far and examining their aspirations for youth housing in the future. The project also highlights important and critical support factors for care leavers as they navigate post-care accommodation in the New Zealand context. By presenting lived-experience insights on housing and accommodation from ten Auckland-based youth in post-care living circumstances and best practice approaches to youth housing for care leavers internationally, the researcher hopes the findings will inform decision-making on care leaver housing at a policy level within the New Zealand Child Welfare System (Oranga Tamariki).

Through the adoption of strengths-based youth development principles and drawing on participatory action methodologies, the researcher aims to amplify youth voice throughout the thesis, and create opportunities for participants to exercise personal agency. This approach aligns with the Ara Taiohi (New Zealand's peak body for youth work) code of ethics which promotes the importance of youth participation in decision-making (Ara Taiohi, 2011):

> Youth participation acknowledges that for healthy development, opportunities should be provided for young people to participate in society and to be involved in all levels of decision making. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states the right of the young person to voice their opinion, have their views listened to and be taken seriously. By engaging young people in social activism, youth workers build citizenship, respect for human rights and a sense of mutual responsibility (p. 36).

Placing youth voice at the centre of the project gives room for care leavers to explore their aspirations on the topic of housing both for their own benefit and for the benefit of other care leavers.

1.4   Theoretical Framework Underpinning the Study

The thesis is informed by and grounded on the principles of the Youth Development Strategy of Aotearoa (YDSA). The YDSA is a foundational government document in New Zealand for best practice approaches to youth development initiatives (New Zealand Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). The YDSA outlines six principles for working with youth from a strengths-based approach. They are:

1: Youth development is shaped by the big picture.

2: Youth development is about young people being connected.

3: Youth development is based on a consistent strengths-based approach.

4: Youth development happens through quality relationships.

5: Youth development is triggered when young people fully participate.

6: Youth development needs good information (pp. 7-8).

These principles reflect the importance of approaches being informed, as stated in #1 above, "by the big picture." This means that young people's experiences and transitions into adulthood are shaped and influenced by the wider social, cultural, and economic conditions that surround them (New Zealand Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002).

For care leavers who are born into disadvantage, special attention must be given to the challenges they face during their transition into independent living. The issue of disconnection from people and place poses enormous challenges for care leavers who readily experience separation from family, peers, and community through frequent and multiple movements within care. Yet, establishing how a young person wants to be connected is vitally important to their development and overall wellbeing.

Promoting strengths-based practice is an essential component of positive youth development. By focusing on the assets and capabilities a young person already possesses, youth practitioners can enhance and reveal hidden strengths pertinent to the topic at hand. A similar approach was taken by the researcher for this project. Being strengths-based in his line of questioning meant the participants had room to explore their own self-determined

housing options from a positive perspective, and could entertain ideas on housing solutions, while acknowledging past and present limitations within current policies.

The YDSA affirms that quality youth development can take place only through the establishment of quality relationships and when young people themselves are able to participate fully. For this to happen, best practice youth development initiatives need to be informed by good information on the subject at hand (New Zealand Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). Therefore, the researcher sought to build authentic and quality relationships with each young person involved in the study, through sharing kai (food) and offering opportunities to engage proactively through participatory methods such as photovoice and photo-elicitation.

1.5   Thesis Organisation

1.5.1   Chapter Two: Literature Review

The literature review investigates the local and international research on housing for care leavers. While there is limited existing literature on this topic in New Zealand, a considerable body of work exists around housing for care leavers internationally. The review establishes who care leavers are, the nature of their vulnerabilities while exiting care—especially when exiting into housing instability—and the role of housing in their transitions to independence. It also covers current policy within New Zealand to support the transition journey of care leavers and highlights which youth housing models are currently available locally and in other jurisdictions. Finally, the literature review describes the importance of including care leavers in post-care decision-making, the role of ontological security in their lives, and the critical aspects of social support vital to positive transitions.

1.5.2   Chapter Three: Methodology

This qualitative study uses a constructivist paradigm and incorporates the methods of photovoice, photo-elicitation and semi-structured interviews. The interview process was informed by the Te Ara Tika Māori Ethical Framework ensuring cultural safety for all participants (Hudson, 2010). The ten care leavers selected are participants connected with a range of Auckland-based child welfare organisations known to the researcher including

Visionwest Community Trust, Lifewise, Youth Horizons, and Ma Te Huru Huru. The data were analysed using thematic analysis.

1.5.3   Chapter Four: Findings

The findings chapter defines and describes the demographics and unique characteristics of the sample, before analysing the themes that emerged through the data analysis process. The findings show the importance of stability and permanence for any post-care housing, the role and significance of social supports in a care leaver's journey, the importance of nature and rural locations, and why tailored responses to individual needs are necessary. It also highlights the critical concerns participants have around their readiness for transition, the skills gaps in their capabilities at the point of exit, why individualised housing separate from their peers is preferable, and reasons to prioritise youth housing for care leavers in the future.

1.5.4   Chapter Five: Discussion

The discussion chapter provides a critical review of the findings from the research, describing how they relate to other studies on care leavers both locally and internationally. The implications include an analysis of the use of photovoice and photo-elicitation, and their value in drawing out themes from vulnerable youth, aligning with strengths-based practice. Additionally, the researcher discusses responses from the participating youth on the validity and suitability of housing placements with immediate family as the initial post-care accommodation choice, citing concerns from participants around post-care stability and safety in such environments. Importantly, the chapter discusses the cultural needs of rangatahi Māori and possible links between their longing for rural housing placements and their desire to be reunited with their whakapapa and māoritanga. The chapter concludes by considering the importance of individual housing options for the youth raised in the research, and the case for introducing more independent housing models in New Zealand.

1.5.5   Chapter Six: Conclusion

The conclusion covers the findings and key discussion points of the research, linking them back to the core aims of the project. In doing so, it offers a succinct summary of the

content of the research and its value for decision-makers regarding care-leaver housing needs. The conclusion acknowledges the limitations of the research such as its regional focus, sample size and demographics, as well as the positioning of the researcher as Pākehā in relation to cultural findings.

It also highlights the lack of research in New Zealand on care leaver housing and calls for greater investigation into care leavers' whereabouts after exiting the system. Equally, it raises concerns around the lack of legislative obligations in relation to care leaver housing, which leaves youth vulnerable to housing instability.

1.6 Conclusion

Overall, the intention of this project is to explore and understand the role and importance of housing in the lives of New Zealand care leavers. In doing so, it is critically important that the study is grounded in strengths-based practice and aligned with the YDSA. The thesis outlines how the research findings and subsequent recommendations compare to international research and evidence about housing for care leavers. Searching for limitations and alignment, the researcher seeks to validate the findings against a broader scope of international research cited in the literature review. Drawing on the participatory action research methods of photovoice and photo-elicitation, the researcher gathers insights from participants through visual means, which sit comfortably within the constructivist paradigm employed. By elevating the importance of care leavers' views on their own housing experience, the researcher intends to amplify the issues and challenges they face for the benefit of decision-makers responsible for their transitions. By giving the care leavers an opportunity to share their chosen solutions to one of their greatest challenges (housing), the researcher hopes the project will capture the attention of government agencies and present sufficient evidence to justify and inspire a new urgency to act.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Background

In New Zealand, the path towards independent living for a young person leaving care is complex and filled with challenges. Having experienced a range of behavioural, social, and psychological difficulties within the care system, exiting care can bring with it even greater challenges that many young people are ill-equipped or not ready to face, at least not alone. Once a young person leaves care, they can lose economic, social, and emotional support in quick succession (Tanur, 2012). One significant challenge facing youth after exiting care is the lack of safe, stable, and suitable accommodation for independent living.

Despite child welfare experts repeatedly identifying housing as a vital element for stable transitions, it remains under-resourced in New Zealand. This lack of housing availability contributes to feelings of anxiety and stress for care leavers who, after experiencing multiple placements, find themselves tackling uncertainty surrounding their future living situation (Tweddle, 2005). When offered a housing placement, it is rare for care leavers in New Zealand to be given any choice of housing type, much less an opportunity to gauge its suitability with regards to their actual needs. The act of telling care leavers where they must live as they exit care mirrors the years spent in care when, for many, their views and opinions have been largely ignored and rejected (Park et al., 2020).

By contrast, when care leavers are consulted on where and with whom their accommodation will be, their inclusion in the decision-making process contributes positively to their wellbeing, as well as to their education and employment prospects beyond care (Stein & Morris, 2010). Yet, stable accommodation cannot be obtained without social supports that recognise the care leavers' emotional, educational, and vocational needs. This recognition creates developmental opportunities to respond to care leavers' needs and heightens the likelihood of a successful transition (Lemon et al., 2005).

Despite such knowledge being widely available through research and child welfare publications globally, housing instability and a lack of housing options still lead many care

leavers into vulnerable situations where other risks are heightened. These risks include homelessness, substance abuse, and mental health distress (Broad, 1996).

Research from Cameron et al. (2019) examined the role of housing for care leavers in Australia and its benefits beyond shelter alone, affirming the argument that housing options for care leavers play a vital role in their transition:

> Having access to secure housing or housing interventions not only reduces young people's chances of encountering homelessness but has been correlated with economic and employment stability as well as a reduced chance of dropping out of school and developing substance dependency (p. 10).

Cameron et al.'s (2019) findings—although specific to Australia—match similar studies across other jurisdictions which commonly note that inadequate access to appropriate housing when transitioning into independent living has a significant influence on care leavers' social and economic prospects (Horitz et al., 2015). Child welfare advocates consider it reasonably likely that New Zealand care leavers have similar experiences to those of their counterparts in Australia, though local data on the role of housing in care leavers' transition journeys are largely non-existent.

While housing is a fundamental issue that must be considered for care leavers seeking to live independently, it is only one of many needs facing care leavers, and its role in their lives cannot be viewed as a singular determinant of success or failure. A young person's care experience, preparation for transition, ethnic background, physical and emotional health, educational experience, and level of resilience all contribute to post-care outcomes (Stein & Morris, 2010). Yet stable and safe housing remains a vital component of any successful transition from care because, without access to it, independent living breaks down, severely limiting a care leaver's ability to progress and grow into a self-directed adult life beyond care.

2.2   A Definition and Description of Care Leavers

The term 'care leaver' is used to describe a young person in the legal care of the state, who, due to their age, find themselves transitioning out of state care and into independent living. Internationally, the age group definition for the care leaving cohort is 16-25-year-olds. In the New Zealand context, care leavers exit the care system at age 18, although they still

receive broader transitional assistance from the state until the age of 25 (Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre, 2017).

Transition programmes for care leavers generally occur over a short period of time. For many, their exit from care has been frequently described as abrupt, rushed, and accompanied by sudden diminishing support from government agencies. Biehal et al. (1995) argued that many care leavers in the UK are unprepared for independent living and named prior negative housing experiences and earlier family relationship difficulties as contributing influences. This research advocated for an improvement in accommodation options for care leavers and more support to obtain life skills, such as budgeting, to prepare them for adult life.

The overall length of support for care leavers can vary from country to country, but there is a broad consensus that the support and time offered in New Zealand remains insufficient for the challenges such young people face. During transition, the state is obligated to work with care leavers to find accommodation and support for further development in areas such as education and employment. The aim is to grow the care leaver to a place of independence and self-reliance. However, in many cases, the transition is too fast to achieve positive outcomes (Baker, 2017).

Attempts to coordinate successful transitions for care leavers are further complicated by the diverse backgrounds and needs of the group. Care leavers are not a homogeneous group, but rather a cohort of individuals whose experiences vary significantly from one young person to the next. The varied experiences of care leavers relate to their birth parents, care experiences, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and personality (Mendes, 2018). Prescribed approaches to transition are inadequate to address individual complexities and diversities experienced by youth coming from such hugely varied backgrounds. Although experts have responded by calling for care transition programmes that allow for individualised approaches, many programmes remain rigid and standardised in their delivery.

The sudden end to care services in the form of social support, accommodation, and education means that many care leavers experience swift exits from care into independent life (Mendes & Purtell, 2017). This speed of transition is one factor that causes some care-leavers to fall into patterns of crime and incarceration, while others experience increased mental

distress and heightened risks of homelessness (Broad, 1996). Failed transitions are far too common and play a significant role in the over-representation of care leavers in long-term homelessness statistics internationally (Mendes, 2018), as discussed in greater detail below. However, given time to prepare for exiting care and appropriate proactive support upon their exit, young people can overcome a variety of challenges during transition and fare significantly better than their unsupported peers (Stein, 2019).

Housing stability for care leavers ranks among the highest self-determined needs internationally, repetitively voiced by multiple cohorts of young people exiting care (Horitz et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important to understand whether housing stability also features as a priority amongst care leavers in the New Zealand context, and if so, to determine the need and role of housing on overall transition outcomes.

2.3   Context: The New Zealand Situation

The difficulty in New Zealand has been a lack of data and research focusing on housing and accommodation for care leavers as they transition out of care. It appears that for much of New Zealand's history of child welfare, little thought has been given to the role that housing plays during a care leaver's transition to independence. Consequently, policy and processes around housing for care leavers in New Zealand looks disorganised at best and, at worst, absent altogether. As Yates's (2001) observes:

> New Zealand has fallen behind other Western countries in its attention to young people leaving the statutory care services to undertake independent living. These young people comprise a very small and hidden population here, and very little is known about long-term outcomes for them, except that, anecdotally, they seem to begin to have children early, and to struggle to raise them without coming to the notice of child welfare services (p. 155).

Nevertheless, New Zealand has recently been in a period of significant upheaval with regard to how it supports its children and young people leaving care. In 2017, Oranga Tamariki (Ministry for Children) was established to replace the older Child, Youth and Family service. Around this time, a series of associated comprehensive reviews of both legislation and strategy related to child wellbeing were conducted. Consequently, the current time period may come to represent either a key turning point for New Zealand or a missed opportunity.

2.3.1 Policy

In 2015, the New Zealand Government appointed an expert advisory panel to make recommendations for reforming the system of support for vulnerable children in New Zealand. The review found that the previous Child, Youth and Family system was not delivering at a satisfactory standard and that transformational change was required (Oranga Tamariki, 2018). As a result, on April 1st, 2017, Oranga Tamariki was established. Its mandate goes beyond simply providing care and protection for children; it extends to enhancing child wellbeing. The legislation raises the age of statutory care and protection from 16 to 17 years and offers support for those aged up to 25 years who have left the care system (Oranga Tamariki, 2017). Part of the legislation relevant to the debate on housing introduced a stronger financial burden on the state to support young people who have left care. This included offering assistance when other financial options are not available, including the right to remain in or return to care up until the age of 21 years (Oranga Tamariki, 2017).

However, little else has been adjusted in the transition section of the legislation. Both acts—the previous 1989 Children, Young Persons, and Families Act, and the Oranga Tamariki Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Bill, 2017—cite the importance of assistance for care leavers in gaining post-care accommodation. Yet any specific commitment to these goals remains absent, despite the difficulty of achieving strong housing outcomes under the previous policies and approaches.

A recent comparison with the UK reveals the problem in New Zealand. Research commissioned by Oranga Tamariki in 2016 from the Social Policy and Evaluation Research Unit (SUPERU) favourably cited the UK approach, where young people were given 'leaving care grants' and the state remained involved and responsible for housing support and other services (Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit, 2016). However, the New Zealand legislation is vague by comparison, declaring a state obligation to assist young people to obtain accommodation, while steering clear from full state responsibility to ensure it happens with adequate support. The vague nature of the legislation has led to ambiguity in housing investment policies for care leavers, therefore giving little confidence to these young people that their accommodation needs will be met when exiting state services.

Furthermore, the lack of viable accommodation options in New Zealand is regularly identified by child welfare agencies and Oranga Tamariki as a limiting factor within their service support for care leavers. In its 2018 Transition from Care to Independence report, Oranga Tamariki repeatedly highlighted the difficulty of finding adequate, safe, and stable accommodation options for young people (Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre, 2018). Twenty five percent of Oranga Tamariki social workers interviewed talked about the difficulty of finding flats for the young people they support. The report also identified a lack of supported accommodation services as the main barrier to finding accommodation (supported accommodation is housing with social worker support for tenants).

The New Zealand Government has recently responded to the needs of care leavers by setting up the Transition Support Service (TSS) in July 2019, which is specifically focused on supporting care leavers with transition key workers who help navigate the individual into independence. The TSS is the first of its kind in New Zealand and offers increased investment for the support of care leavers. It offers support for getting a driver's license, finding a job, finding a place to live, obtaining legal advice, enrolling in education, getting food, and receiving counselling (Oranga Tamariki, n.d.). As the service is still at a formative stage, it is difficult to analyse its effectiveness, but the approach of offering longer-lasting support during a young person's transition is endorsed by child welfare experts, who have been advocating for such programmes to be introduced for some time.

There has been a growing acceptance of the need for out-of-care service supports by Oranga Tamariki (Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre, 2018). The new emphasis on transition supports looks very similar to supports offered through transition programmes in other jurisdictions. Such programmes in place internationally enable youth to live independently in a range of housing types and locations with social worker support on hand. Yet, the need to introduce broader and more diverse housing options to accompany New Zealand's recently established transition workforce remains unaddressed.

Critical to the success of the TSS will be the Government's willingness to include fit-for-purpose housing solutions at adequate volumes, which in the current context do not exist. A greater volume of housing placements is desperately needed for the high numbers of youth exiting care. Without this, the programme could be seen as neglecting care leavers' fundamental need for appropriate housing, and therefore be open to criticism. This failure to

commit to strong policy around housing support for care leavers contrasts with the comments made by the Government's own TSS social workers. The workers stressed the importance of specific housing supply for care leavers as being fundamental to any transition programme, and critical to any successful transition outcomes (Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre, 2018). Unfortunately, to date, their concerns have gone unheard by decision-makers.

2.3.2   Cultural Considerations

Māori are tangata whenua (people of the land) and the indigenous people of New Zealand. In pre-European times, traditional whānau and tribal structures created safety, security, and nurturing environments amongst Māori across New Zealand, especially for their tamariki (children). In the context of this research, it is important to understand the Māori worldview on parenting children. This should be examined before discussing the impacts and consequences of colonisation, which have led many tamariki Māori to come to the attention of child welfare agencies – so much so that rangatahi Māori now make up a significant proportion of care leavers in New Zealand. Jenkins et al.'s (2011) report on traditional Māori parenting describes pre-European customs:

> The fundamental principle for raising children was the underlying belief that children were favoured as gifts from the atua (spiritual beings), from the tipuna (ancestors) and preceded those unborn, which meant that they were tapū (under special rules and restrictions). Any negativity expressed to them was breaking the tapū by offending the atua and the tipuna gone before. Because of their intrinsic relationship to these spiritual worlds, the children inherited their mana (power, prestige). They were treated with loving care (aroha) and indulgence. Punitive discipline in whatever degree, as a method of socialising children, was an anathema to the tipuna (p. 10).

Like many indigenous groups from around the world, Māori have suffered grievances caused by colonisation and, specifically, breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi (Te Tiriti o Waitangi) which was signed with the Crown (British and Colonial authorities) in 1840, to devastating effect. While the Treaty was intended to recognise and protect Māori traditions, practices, and values, it has regularly failed to live up to such aspirations. Since signing the Treaty in 1840, commitments made to Māori by the Crown have been breached repeatedly (Hudson & Russell, 2007). Violations of the Treaty have included the loss of land, culture, rights, and self-sovereignty. One of the many long-term consequences from breaches of the Treaty for Māori has been an over-representation of tamariki Māori who come to the

attention of Oranga Tamariki and social services in New Zealand. Keddell et al. (2022) describes it well, noting:

> Māori children are significantly overrepresented in the child protection system, and the roots of that overrepresentation lie in the legacy of colonisation and intersecting socioeconomic inequities. The breakdown of traditional whānau structures is said to have damaged the environments traditionally required for the safe upbringing of children for some whānau (pp. 6-7).

Placing tamariki Māori into accommodation without consideration of their cultural needs has been commonplace for decades, contributing to cases of inter-generational trauma and cultural dislocation (Atwool, 2018). In New Zealand, despite warning signs of cultural violations being widespread as early as the mid-1980s, the challenge of delivering culturally informed services within the current system remains a concern for many Māori (Atwool, 2018).

This concern is made worse by limits on resources allocated to support cultural safety and cultural connections for rangatahi Māori in care (Atwool, 2018). New Zealand is not alone in its neglect of cultural needs for indigenous groups within care. The loss of cultural identity through placements in care is prevalent within care approaches in the United States, Australia, and Canada, signalling concerns about cultural neglect within policy settings (Mendes, 2011).

Importantly, in 2019, Oranga Tamariki introduced a new set of quality standards to ensure that it upholds Section 7AA (a) and (b) of the Oranga Tamariki Act (1989), which places statutory obligations on the Ministry to align with Treaty of Waitangi commitments of equity and fairness. The quality standards were put in place to help shift Oranga Tamariki away from a monocultural approach to a Māori-centred approach, given the significant over-representation of Māori in the care system (Oranga Tamariki, 2020).

The 7AA quality assurance standards apply across services, policies, and the overall practice of Oranga Tamariki in its response to both tamariki and rangatahi Māori. The goals to meet the standards set by Oranga Tamariki include:

- The protection of Māori rights and interests

- Listening to the voices of Māori (including whānau, Hapū, Iwi and Māori organisations)
- Increasing equity and reducing disparity for Māori in care
- Upholding the mana (dignity, status) of Māori in the care system
- Valuing Māori knowledge, research, data, and evaluation in its role to inform practice and behaviour (Oranga Tamariki, 2020, pp. 4-6)

By applying greater scrutiny to itself through the newly adopted quality standards, Oranga Tamariki hope that Māori will fare far better within the care system than before. Then again, the lack of current evidence in public documentation exposes limited signs of any tangible positive shifts in outcomes for Māori leaving care. While whānau-based housing models designed by Māori have been mooted as culturally relevant options to pursue (Malatest International, 2021), there remains little evidence of their existence. Consequently, it remains difficult to ascertain just how far the Ministry has moved to accomplish this aim.

2.4 Youth Housing Options in New Zealand

At present, it appears that only one model of accommodation exists for youth transitions in New Zealand: the supported living model, in which young people leaving care essentially flat together with social work supports at varying levels of intensity based on individual needs. Supported living programmes in New Zealand are offered by both the State (Oranga Tamariki run homes) and NGOs (Housing and Child Welfare providers). Supported housing models are designed to offer young people safe, secure group housing in the form of a residential home, usually occupied by 3-6 young people. Most supported housing is accessed through an agreement by the young person to sign up to a programme that includes life-skills development, education, and employment, similar to independent living programmes offered in other OECD countries. To date, there appears to be no comprehensive documented review of supported living housing models for care leavers in New Zealand and so their effectiveness and the need (or not) for alternative housing options for care leavers has not been assessed.

In 2018, Malatest International did conduct a small, qualitative process evaluation on a series of supported living programmes in New Zealand. The evaluation analysed a selection

of supported living accommodation programmes delivered by a group of social service providers (including Lifewise, Challenge 2000, and Kāhui Tū Kaha). The objective of the evaluation was to assess whether the supported living model was an effective form of transitional accommodation for youth leaving care. A later phase of the evaluation sought to understand what aspects of the programme worked for young people and what, if any, difficulties young people experienced during their time in the supported accommodation setting.

The evaluation showed that the supported living approach worked well for some youth, but not for others, ultimately producing mixed results depending on the individual circumstances of each young person. Some felt the supported living model enhanced progress in education and employment outcomes and offered support for independent living. For others, there was the feeling that their progress was limited by the congregate nature of the programme and the potential for volatility in relationships with their peers (Malatest International, 2018).

In its review, Malatest International (2018) highlighted the importance of key workers and their role in supporting young people. The report emphasised the significance and importance of key workers maintaining a good understanding of the cultural context of young people engaging in the programme. It also identified that the supported living model was not suited to youth presenting with complex needs but was limited in describing what specific complexities warranted a different housing offering, and why (Malatest International, 2018). The evaluation also stressed the importance of a potential interim step between supported living and full independent living for those graduating the programme, highlighting an option for a less-intensive flatting model with lighter touch key worker supports as a possible solution.

The evaluation identified a set of key principles to ensure the best outcomes in a supported living programme. They included:
- Creating an environment where young people can try, test, and fail in their attempts to live independently with supports onsite to assist
- Positive relationships between youth and their key workers
- The re-establishment of strong social networks for the youth in the community as critical to successful transition into independent living

- The significance of the culture and identity of each young person, and importance of cultural competencies in workers from the providers offering housing (Malatest International, 2018, p.10)

The report recommended an assessment of the suitability of all accommodation options for each young person before committing them to a supported living environment. While supported living programmes have contributed to positive and transformational experiences for some, they have also had negative effects on youth whose prior living circumstances have not adequately prepared them for peer flatting environments (Malatest International, 2018).

A more detailed description of the features that would cause youth to fail in the programme was not available in the report. Therefore, any definitive conclusions about the suitability of the supported living model for different cohorts of young people are difficult to determine or analyse. The evaluation stated the potential need for exploration into scattered-site housing options for youth as discussed below (Malatest International, 2018). Despite this recommendation, no further advancements have been made on care leaver housing options since the Malatest International research was completed, and supported living remains the sole youth housing model active in New Zealand.

2.5   Youth Housing Options Internationally

There are a small number of housing models specific to youth that are currently active around the world. The list below is not necessarily exhaustive but covers the most referenced and researched youth housing programme types within a range of reports, reviews, and studies investigated by the researcher. They include independent living programmes (ILPs), supported accommodation, the Foyer model, supported accommodation for youth with special needs, congregate-site housing, scattered-site housing, and cabin style accommodation.

2.5.1   Independent Living Programmes

Independent living programmes for youth (ILPs) are run throughout the United States and in some European contexts. ILPs are time-limited programmes seeking to support at-risk

youth as they transition to adulthood. They are designed to recognise that exiting care is not a singular moment in time but rather a process that includes the establishment of independent accommodation. As with most youth housing programmes, ILPs focus heavily on life skills acquisition and intensive social supports (Donkoh et al., 2006). They are delivered in both group and individual housing settings. The accommodation part of the ILP can operate in shelters, boarding homes, semi-supervised apartments, and transitional housing units (Straka et al., 2013).

Regardless of the accommodation type, ILPs include supervision from a workforce that provides daily support to the young people in their first independent living environment (Donkoh et al., 2006). In some cases, ILPs operate with young people living in independent flats while key workers reside alongside them in adjacent residences. The flexibility of being able to utilise different housing types to implement ILPs is one of their unique and positive characteristics.

2.5.2   Supported Housing

Congregate supported housing for youth is a common model adopted widely internationally, and here in New Zealand. The model is used as a transitional or so-called 'trans-permanent' housing approach for care leavers as well as homeless youth from a range of vulnerable backgrounds. Trans-permanent housing denotes the option of a permanent tenancy, while also recognising the temporary nature of any housing programme for adolescents.

Supported housing is widely adopted by Oranga Tamariki in New Zealand as the youth housing programme of choice (Malatest International, 2021). While the model itself can be implemented in scattered-site housing (units located separately from one another within middle income neighbourhoods) or congregate settings (group housing / in high-density social housing locations), in New Zealand, it is mostly applied as a group housing model. However, supported accommodation programmes can also operate in residential homes, purpose-built facilities, or congregate apartment-style complexes. Supported housing programmes offer youth a tailored housing solution that highlights the need for youth to graduate to more independent living environments with diminishing supports over time (Straka et al., 2013).

2.5.3   Supported Accommodation for Youth with Special Needs

Supported accommodation for youth with special needs operates similarly to the standard supported housing models but is tailored to care leavers who have been diagnosed with complex and significant mental health conditions. These models operate with a more specialised approach incorporating intensive supports and stronger links to health and mental health services. However, such approaches are relatively new and remain underfunded due to mental health and child welfare services being reluctant to invest more significantly into higher needs groups. Without investment in bespoke models for this group, the youth are left to consider housing options that are designed for older cohorts of high-needs adults and are often placed into housing environments that are unsafe and inappropriate for younger people (Strata et al., 2013).

2.5.4   Congregate-Site Housing

Congregate-site housing for youth usually consists of a series of independent units with common areas situated within an apartment complex or a multiple unit housing complex (Malatest International, 2021). It typically applies supported accommodation methodologies that offer youth the chance to experience independent living within separate housing units. Support from key workers in this model is based on variable ratios depending on the jurisdiction, organisational design, and funding of the service.

2.5.5   Scattered-Site Housing

Scattered-site housing is a dispersed social housing model that provides housing placements for youth amongst middle income communities. Scattered-site housing can be in the form of stand-alone housing, individual units, or apartments. Scattered-site housing models are praised for their ability to integrate vulnerable young people into more affluent suburbs, avoiding the stigma often associated with congregate-site social housing models, and offering more opportunities for independence (Malatest International, 2021). However, they have more potential to lead the youth into an environment where they can feel isolated and alone in an unfamiliar setting. Whereas congregate housing models emphasise the importance of positive peer interactions within their design, scattered-site models emphasise the value of youth being introduced to a new socio-economic environment, separate from

their peers. Scattered-site housing programmes usually have a duration of between one and three years.

2.5.6 Foyer Model

The Foyer youth housing model is an innovative service that works with youth aged in their later teens and early twenties. It is a residential group housing model, usually delivered in a purpose-built facility with common living areas shared by the residents. In the Foyer model, youth receive strong supports including job training, education, and life-skills development within an affordable group accommodation setting (Levin et al., 2016). Foyer models are usually implemented in bespoke and purpose-built facilities, and can house large or small numbers of youth depending on the design and size of the building (Malatest International, 2021).

The model is designed to assist youth who cannot live at home to gain the skills and competencies required for independent living. The Foyer model seeks to pair together youth who present with different levels of vulnerability, meaning that higher functioning youth are able to have a positive effect on those with more complex needs (Straka et al., 2013). A key success factor of the Foyer model is its requirement that all participants agree to an 'action plan' which outlines specific goals for them personally and vocationally. This approach is not dissimilar to the ILP model, which also operates with an agreed development plan between the youth and their key workers.

2.5.7 Cabin Style Accommodation - Kids Under Cover in Australia

Kids Under Cover is a not-for-profit organisation that builds studio cabins to house homeless young people on the grounds of family homes (Kids Under Cover, n.d.). The programme provides scholarships and mentoring support alongside innovative one-bedroom studios for accommodation needs. A young person is able to grow their skills in independent living while living in the studio either on their family's property or on a host family's property and having social support in their immediate proximity. The scholarships provide the young people with financial assistance to sustain their tenancies and seek out further education and employment opportunities while they are housed (Kids Under Cover, 2020).

Their progress is supported by a youth mentor with whom the youth engage in regular one-on-one contact for guidance and encouragement.

2.5.8   Concluding Remarks on Housing Options

After considering the models and programmes available in other countries, New Zealand's care leaving housing programmes appear to be underdeveloped and limited by the implementation of one model of housing only, that being supported accommodation. While the programmes offered in other countries are not perfect and present their own challenges, care leavers do have accommodation choices, with two or more well-established housing options from which to choose in most jurisdictions.

Since a peer-to-peer model of housing—through the supported living model—is the only option available to care leavers in the New Zealand context, it is critical to consider how successful peer-flatting housing models are for care leavers. It is equally vital to understand the effects of congregate housing on the personal wellbeing of care leavers. Importantly, unrestricted interaction with peers from similarly traumatised backgrounds can derail a care leaver's progress. Researchers sometimes use the deficit language of 'contagion' to describe such negative peer influence. Exposure to negative peer influence can, at times, cause negative behaviour in the long-term. Therefore, peer flatting in supported models similar to those offered in New Zealand can increase the potential of relational conflicts occurring (Gifford-Smith et al., 2005).

It must be noted, however, that Wonnum (2014) presented a more positive explanation of peer interactions in supported living abodes in the United States and counters claims about the effects of negative peer influences. Wonnum (2014) argued that, in residential care settings, positive effects of co-housing can occur. Her findings indicated that placing vulnerable youth together in a residential setting does not necessarily lead to increased troubled behaviour.

Conversely, an American (Georgia State) Boystown study of youth residential facilities highlighted the influence of the predominant culture set by the youth in group settings (Friman et al., 1996). Where positive peer influence was the majority culture, it overwhelmed minority negative behaviours. Equally, when negative influences were larger in

number, the positive minority were suffocated in their efforts to change negative peer leadership.

In conclusion, the influence of peer-based models of accommodation and their negative effects on some care leavers raises the question of whether alternative options for housing placements are needed in New Zealand. The Malatest International (2018) report mentioned earlier, clearly concluded that the one available option fails to cater to the diverse and complex needs within the youth transition service. Unfortunately, the approach of investing in only one model of housing for care leavers (supported living) continues, with no apparent strategy for change.

2.6   General Challenges Facing Care Leavers

Before tackling the question of housing, care leavers face several challenges and obstacles as they begin their journey to adult life and independence. Their experiences prior to care and within the care system often cause long-term distress and complexities that last well beyond their young adulthood and do little to prepare them for that journey. Internationally, the approach to supporting care leavers varies, with poor outcomes remaining consistent across jurisdictions leading to ongoing vulnerability during adult life (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019).

2.6.1   Biological Family Situation

Care leavers invariably come from families whose circumstances have been shaped by poverty, relationship difficulties, violence, mental distress, and substance abuse (Mendes, 2011). Children can enter care with significant behavioural, emotional, and physical health difficulties, compounded by the effects of abandonment through the loss of significant connection to their birth parents. In New Zealand, some enter care because of the incarceration of their parents, poverty-related factors, or personal involvement in the justice system. Others enter due to the death of their parents or being unaccompanied minors seeking asylum (Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre, 2018).

Compared to many young people, care leavers across jurisdictions face significant challenges related to accommodation, employment, education, and other transitional opportunities. Lack of family supports and a limit on social networks isolate care leavers from opportunities readily available to youth who have not been in care. The lack of support raises the likelihood of difficulties as care leavers attempt to navigate the challenges of transitioning into independent living (Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2004). Furthermore, young people leaving care can find themselves still recovering from abuse and neglect prior to their care experience. Such experiences can have significant effects on a care leaver's mental health. There remains, however, little flexibility on the transition age for care leavers.

2.6.2   Developmental Stages

During adolescence, young people are working through key questions around their identity, where they belong, and how they might navigate the new world of adulthood. Adolescence is commonly defined as a transitional phase of life for young people from all backgrounds. However, those in care can be particularly at risk of losing a sense of self-continuity, as they do not maintain the same familial links as their peers without care experience (Ward, 2011).

A sense of belonging and connectedness is particularly important for care leavers when considering their ability to transition out of care successfully (Ward, 2011). Ward emphasises the risks for care leavers losing any sense of continuity from their childhood and recommends the preserving of items with sentimental value to the young person, such as mementos and photographs, to help ground a care leaver's identity. She stresses the danger of care leavers losing the threads that connect their past, present, and future, due to the loss of even the most fragile sense of belonging that has been obtained temporarily during placements within the care system.

Youth development experts agree with Ward, emphasising the fundamental importance of the role physical places and people play in shaping a young person's sense of belonging (Whitlock, 2004). It is common for care leavers to find themselves simultaneously exiting both relationships and living environments. This has the effect of doubling their loss, resulting in detrimental effects on their sense of identity and continuity.

2.6.3   Mental Health Related Issues

Diagnosed mental health conditions are raised regularly as one of the key challenges facing care leavers and their capacity and ability to transition out of care. A study by Simpson et al. (2017) in the Wellington region of New Zealand found that for every ten children or young people placed into care, three had some form of mental health need. The research presented statistics from prevalence studies internationally which showed a staggering 54% of care leavers exiting care with mental health needs, and 30% experiencing chronic mental health needs after leaving care (Simpson at el., 2017). The report also highlighted the lack of research on long-term mental health outcomes for care leavers in the New Zealand context.

By comparison, in the UK, it was understood and recognised that care leavers were at greater risk of mental health conditions than other cohorts of youth (Lamont et al., 2009); it was also understood that UK care leavers living with mental health conditions found it difficult to navigate transition services where specialist support was not available to them. Hence, the issue of specialist support was considered critically important when recognising that almost one-half of care leavers presented with a psychiatric disorder.

The barriers to independence and difficulties in transition for care leavers with mental health conditions extend to their housing placements. Such challenges are faced by care leavers in New Zealand and in other countries as well. Lamont (2009) reported a reluctance from housing providers to accommodate youth with mental health challenges due to their complex needs and ongoing difficulties as tenants.

2.6.4   Educational Aspirations and Challenges

Educational challenges are common among care leavers whose transience during childhood and adolescence can contribute to prolonged periods of disrupted schooling. For many, a life of movement from one placement to the next, can stifle one's ability to gain the necessary stability to achieve well on their education journey. Factors that contribute to the overall low educational achievement of care leavers include insufficient monitoring of educational progress, a history of socio economic deprivation, significant behavioural and learning needs, and lack of exposure to environments where education is valued (Cording,

2019). However, despite these challenges, care experienced young people still value the opportunities education can afford them, especially educational activities that have the potential to grow their social and support networks.

The gap between educational achievement for care leavers and youth without care experience is significant. Unfortunately, care leavers experience challenges in growing strong literacy and numeracy skills, attaining higher education, and consistently attending school (Cording, 2019). As noted in Harvey et al.'s (2015) observations on education access and achievement for care leavers in Australia: "Care leavers rarely transition to higher education. They are largely excluded from the level of education that brings the highest wage premiums and lifetime rewards (p. 5)."

A number of educational protective factors have been identified, which can help to contribute to better educational outcomes for care leavers. Such factors include access to support and advice, positive mentoring and role modelling, financial assistance, housing support, and guidance to establish tangible and realistic educational goals (Cording, 2019). In light of the vulnerabilities care leavers face on their educational journey, it is vital to consider the role schooling and higher education can play in their lives, and how agencies can support care experienced youth to attain higher education. As noted by Cording (2019), "care-experienced children and young people display many strengths, including holding high educational and life aspirations. Building upon these strengths should be at the centre of any interventions designed to support these children and young people (p. 56)."

Despite the challenges care leavers face in their childhood which can act as barriers to educational achievement, there remains optimism amongst child welfare professionals, that if given the appropriate support, care leavers can attain higher educational goals. However, their ability to do so is dependent on a steadfast commitment to maintain the necessary relationships, learning support and engagement with school which is proven to foster continuity and growth on their education journey.

2.6.5   Exiting Care

Research from Ward (2000) in New Zealand—aptly titled "Happy Birthday, Goodbye"—addressed concerns surrounding an 'automatic discharge' from care at age 17

irrespective of any challenges or difficulties that would significantly compromise a young person's chances of a successful transition. In many cases, authorities assume youth are automatically ready for transition when they turn 18, with limited attention drawn to other complexities peculiar to their individual circumstances (Ward, 2000).

Maturity, more than chronological age, is important when reviewing the capability of young care leavers to find and sustain accommodation on their own, with living skills having a significant bearing on a young person's ability to sustain independent accommodation. McCoy et al. (2008) gathered insights on this topic from older youth leaving the foster care system in several locations across the United States. The research uncovered feelings from youth who described their exit as 'being dumped.' Youth communicated concerns around the unplanned, unexpected, and rushed nature of their exits. Their views reaffirm a case for the introduction of more time, support, and flexibility for care leavers throughout their transition journey. McCoy et al. (2008) suggested that youth are not ready to leave care between the ages of 17 and 19 and recommended delaying exits to a minimum age of 21.

This raising of the care leaving age has been supported by several child welfare agencies in New Zealand. In 2015, a small group of agencies launched a campaign to raise the care leaving age from 17 to 21 (Newson & Gibb, 2015). The campaign named 'We Don't Stop Caring' was initiated by Youthline, Dingwall Trust, Wesley Community Action, Child Poverty Action Group, Christchurch Methodist Mission, and Action Station. It created pressure on the government of the day and contributed to a 2019 change in policy within Oranga Tamariki. The law now offers youth in care the right to remain or return to their caregiver placements until they reach 21 years of age (Oranga Tamariki, 2019).

This new right was deemed a landmark change for care leavers in New Zealand (Ministry of Social Development, 2016). The age of transition remains a contested subject for decision-makers across jurisdictions who cite an individual's maturity (not equivalent to the 'age of maturity') as a key factor to consider before placing a young person in their first independent living environment.

The argument that many guardians and parents would not expect youth who lack care experiences to live alone by the age of 18 is regularly raised in this debate. Care leavers have childhood histories which include difficulties that children without care experience have

never had to navigate, meaning that a care leaver's journey into adulthood is met with less support than the journey into adulthood for children outside of the care system. Häggman-Laitila et al.'s (2019) research on care leavers' preparedness for adult life underscores the disadvantages for care leavers:

> In spite of differences in welfare systems of different countries, internationally it is the case that care leavers' outcomes are poorer in education, employment, income, housing and teenage parenthood than their counterparts' outcomes in the general population. They suffer more often from mental health and behavioural problems, substance abuse and involvement in criminality. Also, the rate of mortality and disability pensions is higher compared with their peers from the general population. Poor outcomes tend to accumulate in the lives of these young people, and their vulnerability in adult life is high (p. 634).

Widespread unsatisfactory outcomes for care leavers are documented across several jurisdictions. As a response, greater sensitivity is needed when approaching care transitions, factoring in readiness based on age, trauma history, and preparedness for independent living.

Empirical research by Colman and Hendry (2018) in New Zealand, Scotland, and the United States showed that young people who must cope with a multitude of changes and challenges in a short space of time have worse outcomes than those who face fewer challenges. Research by Stein (2006) affirms Coleman and Hendry's (2018) observations, stating the importance of considering the complexities facing each individual young person alongside their speed of transition.

Looking to prevent rushed exits from care, a study by Glynn and Mayock (2021) promoted "caring recognition" as an important strategy. Caring recognition is a term originally proposed by Honneth's (1995) work which described the option of remaining with a foster family beyond the care exit age. It offers the young person continuity of relationship and housing by allowing them to remain with the family with whom they have been placed, when this option is mutually attractive to both caregiver and care leaver. However, given the multiple movements many care leavers experience in the care system, it has only limited potential as a solution. Such movements lessen the strength of bonds with foster parents and make the option of extending care placements beyond traditional exit timeframes a rarity for many.

2.6.6   Effect of Care Placements on Transition

Many care leavers experience difficulties within their care placements which affect their ability to prepare for a stable transition to adulthood. Multiple placements mean frequent movements between different living environments which create uncertainty and lack of trust. This can contribute to behavioural difficulties which is not surprising because each new placement means starting again with foster parents, friends, schools, and networks, leading many to feel isolated, neglected, and alone (Stein & Morris, 2010). Such experiences of unstable movements have been connected to a lack of stability in housing once youth exit care. Insights from a personal communication with Australian academic Philip Mendes highlight the variance in post-care housing experiences for youth based on prior care placement:

> We know that particular groups of care leavers are most vulnerable to homelessness. They include those who have multiple placements, those who leave care at a younger age, those who transition from residential care, those who have a disability, those involved in crime and offending, and those who have a range of mental health or substance use issues. These young people tend to have been excluded from education, experienced trauma as a result of abuse and neglect, and have few positive social or family connections. Conversely, young people who experience placement stability in care, including secure attachments and supportive social networks, are far more likely to attain good housing outcomes after care (P. Mendes, Personal Communication, June 21, 2020).

Mendes links the stability of place for children in care with their ability and capacity to sustain housing placements as they exit the system as young adults. His view is shared by other experts in this field of study including Stein and Morris (2010), whose research in the UK indicated that care placement instability can have a significant negative influence on the ability of care leavers to sustain future housing placements later in life. Stein (2006) also demonstrates that when placements are supportive and stable, young people can flourish and show their resilience in overcoming difficulty. In addition, a connection to meaningful and lasting relationships with biological family members or caregivers, beyond care placements, can reverse a trajectory of neglect to one of recovery and support, ultimately leading to better chances of a stable transition out of care (Stein & Morris, 2010).

In New Zealand, Oranga Tamariki has made a commitment to establishing and maintaining a sense of belonging for all tamariki via connections to whānau, Hāpu and Iwi while in care. There is no dispute from government officials and child welfare experts that connections between Māori and Non-Māori tamariki to their bloodline and genealogy throughout their care experience leads to greater wellbeing (Oranga Tamariki, n.d.). Oranga Tamariki describes the importance of such connections on their website stating:

> In establishing safe whānau or family connections for te tamaiti we should engage with whānau or family as early as possible to discuss the importance of these connections and enlist their support… Remember, sometimes whānau or family dynamics have been disrupted and this may isolate te tamaiti from valuable relationships... It is important to approach these discussions with whānau or family respectfully and sensitively in order to connect te tamaiti with the full breadth of their whānau or family relationships and resources (Oranga Tamariki n.d., establishing whānau or family connections for te tamaiti, para. 1-3).

Yet, establishing and maintaining genuine connections between tamariki in care and their whānau or family can be reliant on the level of manaakitanga and acceptance they experience with their assigned state care social workers. As described in Te Mana Whakamaru Tamariki Motohake (Independent Children's Monitor) 'Experiences of Care in Aotearoa' (2022) report:

> Whānau tell us that factors that contribute to manaakitanga include social workers checking in regularly with them, acting kindly and transparently, and giving them practical and relevant support. Whānau say that manaakitanga occurs when social workers and other staff act in ways that leave whānau feeling understood and respected. Conversely, whānau told us that manaakitanga is inhibited when they feel animosity from social workers. Whānau know if a social worker has a negative view of them. They told us of situations when they had felt their mana was diminished by social workers' negativity…For many whānau, it seems having a positive experience of manaakitanga depends on whether they have a good relationship with their assigned social worker (p. 54).

According to the 'Experiences of Care in Aotearoa' (2022) report, it appears that connections to whānau during care can be significantly influenced either positively or negatively by the attitude and approach of a single social worker. This is concerning as it could leave some tamariki vulnerable to unnecessary distancing from whānau or family ties while in care if they encounter difficulties in their relationship with their social worker. Given the 2019 legislative changes within the Oranga Tamariki Act (Section 7AA) which prioritise whānau, hāpu and iwi connections for tamariki in care, one could conclude that leaving

whānau and tamariki relationships in the hands of a sole social worker has its flaws (Oranga Tamariki Act, 1989). Especially when considering the struggle many care leavers face years later, to re-establish whānau or family connections after their care experience has come to an end.

However, Oranga Tamariki does appear to be making every effort to connect tamariki in care to whānau, and recognition of these familial connections are well documented. The Independent Children's Monitor "Experiences of Care in Aotearoa' (2022) report evidenced attempts by Oranga Tamariki to ensure whānau connections were established and maintained, while acknowledging the significant work ahead, stating:

> For 85 percent of [352] tamariki Māori, Oranga Tamariki had identified, and arranged to make, connections with the important members of their whānau. However, the Oranga Tamariki review of 352 tamariki Māori in care shows that, 38 percent had not had an assessment of their identity, cultural connection, or belonging needs; and 61 percent had not had their wider cultural connections identified (this includes making contact arrangements with important members of their hapū and iwi) (p. 12).

It is important to note that identifying and arranging to make connections with whānau is not evidence that the connections will be made. Yet, such connections are critical when considering that once a young person exits care, they can struggle to find and maintain key support networks to navigate their transition successfully. Lack of direct family support and community networks is common. Having experienced multiple placements within care, meaningful social relationships can be difficult for care leavers to foster and maintain (Action for Children & Jo Cox Loneliness Foundation, 2017). Add in the difficulties around educational achievement due to disrupted schooling, and care leavers are on the back foot when compared to peers without care experience.

Their position can be further prejudiced by limited financial capability at the point of transition. Youthful naivety and lack of training on financial responsibilities can lead many to start adult life on welfare (Mendes, 2005). Some experience emotional, physical, and sexual abuse while in care, which can compound any trauma from home prior to entering the care system (Mendes & Purtell, 2017). Intensive support during the first few months of independence is often particularly crucial for ameliorating common feelings of anxiety and loneliness (Fauth et al., 2012).

These complexities can negatively influence and limit the success of any housing placements as youth exit care. Regardless of the housing type available, the long-term emotional, educational, relational difficulties, and trauma experienced by many care leavers must be considered alongside any housing needs. In most cases, transitions that fail, including those entailing a lack of or loss of housing placements, involve a variety of problematic circumstances and vulnerabilities that cannot be addressed in isolation.

2.6.7   The Abdication of Responsibility by the State

Globally, state support for care leavers is viewed by experts as inadequate, with governments repeatedly failing to take responsibility for the legal and moral implications of caring for young people (Mendes, 2011). A connection between failed housing placements during transitions was recently identified through a 2019 study conducted by the Scottish Government (A Way Home Scotland, 2019). The report recommended that young people from state care should never be homeless, as the state shall maintain a fundamental responsibility to see them homed until a minimum of 26 years of age (A Way Home Scotland, 2019). Scotland's strategy seeks to eliminate the effects of abandonment previously experienced by care leavers who suffered from a lack of support during their transition, leading to failed housing placements and periods of episodic homelessness. The decision to place more responsibility on the state in Scotland, demands stronger accountability on the part of decision-makers regarding child welfare. These efforts are focused on reducing the significant number of care leavers in Scotland who find themselves homeless after leaving care (A Way Home Scotland, 2019). Details on the prevalence of homelessness amongst care leavers in New Zealand and internationally is detailed below.

Still, decision-makers responsible for policy in other countries, regularly attribute blame to individual failings, rather than scrutinising their own structural and systemic failures that affect the success of care leavers' transitions (Mendes, 2011). According to Mendes, many nations spend only a fragment of their out-of-care budgets on care leavers, indicating a lack of understanding about the risks of care leavers failing to navigate successfully the final hurdle of their care experience. He advocates for increased upfront investment in supporting care leavers to transition well, arguing that proper support and training would save on subsequent welfare costs. Mendes' (2011) view is particularly important to consider given the

cost of providing transitional housing, which places a large financial burden on the state, one that many governments have not been prepared to shoulder.

Finally, a criticism of policymakers has included an argument that the state has neglected to provide care leavers with the basic duty of care commonly afforded to children without care experience. Connections to essential social, community, educational, housing, and economic opportunities remain limited and scattered in many western systems of care. Critics of state system inadequacies point to a state guardianship obligation being neglected, and regularly call for increased and proactive care leaver support.

2.7   The Risk of Homelessness for Care Leavers (An International Perspective)

A recent study in the United States shows that between 11-36% of youth transitioning out of care become homeless (Fryar et al., 2017). Further research by Fowler et al. (2017) reported that one-fifth of US teens aging out of care are still in inadequate housing situations two years after transition. Fowler et al.'s (2017) findings confirm Fryar et al.'s (2017) view that youth homelessness numbers are, broadly speaking, influenced negatively by care leavers with their research concluding that up to 30% of care leavers experienced at least one night of homelessness during transition.

Similarly, reports from the United Kingdom indicated that care leavers drift in and out of homelessness, moving between different accommodation options and struggling to sustain their tenancies. An estimated 20% of care leavers in the UK experienced homelessness in the first two years of leaving care (Kilkenny, 2012). Kilkenny further suggests that housing displacement amongst youth heightens the likelihood of long-term homelessness as adults. Without intervention, youth experiencing street homelessness can begin to view homelessness as an inevitable "way of life" (Kilkenny, 2012, p. 87).

Housing experts offer firm criticism of the care system's approach to care leavers and their accommodation options, citing the link between inadequate out-of-care services and homelessness (MacKenzie et al., 2020). The latter is evidenced in Australia, for example, via a 2009 The Create Foundation survey which found that 35% of youth transitioning out of care became homeless in their first year (Beauchamp, 2014). This is an indication that

Australia's child protection systems have struggled to access adequate and stable accommodation choices for youth leaving care.

The absence of adequate housing, combined with the fact that many care leavers lack the personal skills and capabilities to manage in an independent setting, increases the likelihood of homelessness (MacKenzie et al., 2020). Even though linkages between failed transitions and homelessness have been evident in Australia since the 1990s, there has been limited investigation of the effectiveness and success of aftercare programmes (MacKenzie et al., 2020).

Mendes' (2018) responds to the difficulties in care leaver transitions in Australia, stating that the stability of a home, alongside tailored stable supports, must be present to enable successful transitions.

The effect of housing instability, and a related loss of a sense of belonging, amongst the care leaving cohort is demonstrated in the following quote from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute:

> When young people are unprepared for independent living or when their accommodation is unsuitable and their housing breaks down, they are at acute risk of homelessness. For some, their pathway into homelessness results from eviction or fleeing problematic shared arrangements. For those who return to the family home or share with siblings, a breakdown in their relationships may be a precursor to homelessness. Others exit care directly into homelessness (p. 30).

2.8   The Risk of Homelessness for Care Leavers (A New Zealand Perspective)

In New Zealand, no comprehensive research exists to measure the percentage of care leavers who end up experiencing homelessness during or after their transition out of care. However, experts agree it is likely that New Zealand follows the trends indicated in international research which identifies the risk of homelessness as a significant barrier to successful transitions, and one that has still not been resolved in many jurisdictions. Cleaver (2016) notes:

> The New Zealand government has not funded any studies into care leaving, however there are a number of nongovernment funded studies, particularly some New Zealand

qualitative studies of care leavers' experiences and a vast amount of international literature on the subject of care leavers' needs and barriers to success post-care all reporting issues in New Zealand of homelessness, mental health needs, poverty, and unemployment consistent with international research (p. 24).

Statistics on the extent of the issue are hidden in New Zealand due to the lack of data collection. This means analysis of care leavers' living circumstances beyond care, and their success within them, is reduced to educated guesswork. The New Zealand Government currently has no way of knowing how many care leavers fall out of care transitions and present as homeless one, two, five, or ten years later. There are no recorded destination data sets to indicate the size or scale of housing instability for care leavers after exiting care.

Documentation received via an Official Information Application (OIA) lodged for the current research indicates that Oranga Tamariki had 756 young people in its transition out of care service in September 2020, yet had only 59 funded beds for the same cohort. According to the OIA, Oranga Tamariki does not currently keep records of where the remaining 697 young people live, what their housing circumstances are, or how many care leavers are at risk of falling into permanent homelessness. Oranga Tamariki stated that 340 young people in care were 17 years old at the time the request was lodged and were likely to join the 756 in transition over the following 12 months (Official Information Act, Oranga Tamariki, June, 2021). The response to the request also included the aim of Oranga Tamariki to grow its transition bed volumes to 228 by 2023. This is still significantly fewer beds than the number of young people in the Transition Support Service.

Information from the Ministry of Social Development on the number of care leavers housed in temporary accommodation was also sought by the researcher for this project. Although no data specific to care leavers was available, the researcher did receive a response to an OIA in May 2021, stating that 1,899 16–24-year-olds were in motel accommodation across New Zealand. These young people had been recipients of an emergency housing special needs grant (EH SNG) and were given temporary accommodation in motels throughout New Zealand, usually for a few weeks (Ministry of Social Development OIA Response, Turner, 2021).

Throughout the period of writing this literature review, the researcher twice asked both Oranga Tamariki and MSD (October 2020 and May 2021) to disclose how many young

people represented in motel accommodation were categorised as care leavers. The researcher was seeking to understand, at least in part, the size of housing instability for care leavers in New Zealand. Neither MSD or Oranga Tamariki could answer definitively. Therefore, data on the question cannot be presented. Oranga Tamariki issued a response to the researcher's questions on this matter conceding the following on the accommodation circumstances of care leavers: "Please note that we do not record information on how many care leavers are receiving support from MSD to be housed in temporary accommodation such as motels (Oranga Tamariki Official Information Application, September 2020, p. 2)."

MSD responded by stating:

As the Transition Service Support (TSS) is administered by Oranga Tamariki, the Ministry does not hold information on whether an EH SNG client is enrolled in the TSS programme. As such, your request is refused under section 18(g) of the Act as the information you requested is not held by the Ministry, and I have no grounds to believe that the information is held by another department or Minister of the Crown or organisation (Ministry of Social Development Official Information Application, July 2021, p. 1).

This lack of data leads to a lack of insight on the pressures and demand for post-care housing provision. It also raises questions about the Government's guardianship responsibilities to care leavers, and potential state negligence regarding the whereabouts of care leavers in the government system.

It is concerning that a significant number of young people are being housed in motel accommodation without any agency support. It is equally concerning that government cannot identify or distinguish between care experienced youth and those without care experience amongst a current data set of youth housed in motels. Nevertheless, drawing on evidence from other countries, which shows a strong correlation between failed transitions and homelessness, one could surmise that the vulnerability experienced amongst care leavers in the US, the UK, and Australia is experienced by New Zealand care leavers as well.

2.9   Key Existing Previous Research

2.9.1   Care Leavers' Participation in Decision-Making

Strong international evidence shows the importance of youth voice and self-determination in decision-making concerning their care transitions, especially around accommodation support (Gill & Daw, 2017). For many care leavers, feelings of being excluded in decision-making start much earlier than the point of transition. In the UK, Lee and Berrick (2014) uncovered feelings of losing control, disillusionment, and distrust as a result of frequent and sudden moves within the care system. The lack of communication about changing living circumstances meant that young people were denied the opportunity to exercise agency concerning their future. This led to attitudes of disengagement when it came to transitions (Lee & Berrick, 2014). In these contexts, when young people actively sought to contribute to decisions about their care, they were left with a diminished view of their ability to influence the outcomes, despite policy deeming their voices to be important. Consequently, care leavers regularly concluded that their views would be ignored and unsupported (Lee & Berrick, 2014).

Given his acclaimed academic work on Australian care leavers and their housing needs, Phil Mendes was specifically consulted for this research. The researcher asked Mendes how important the voice of the young person is in determining their housing placement before transition plans are finalised. Mendes' response reaffirmed Lee and Berrick's (2014) findings:

> It is very important that young people be given the opportunity to fully participate in decision-making processes around their transitional housing and have an opportunity to assert their choice and agency. There should be a Plan B and C as well as a Plan A, so that if the young person's initial preference (which is often to remain with or alternatively to return to live with family members) doesn't work out, they are then given the opportunity with appropriate ongoing service supports to consider alternative options (P. Mendes, Personal Communication, June 21, 2020).

Mendes' response highlights the importance of youth voice in such decision-making. He also acknowledges the importance of care leavers being mature enough to make informed decisions about their living circumstances beyond care. He is, however, quick to warn against

using engagements with youth on decisions for their future as a token gesture when there is no genuine intent to act on what the youth say.

The experience of care leavers in the US has mirrored the frustrations of those in the UK and Australia. US care leavers have expressed frustrations that their exit from care was controlled by the authorities and implemented without consultation (Lee & Berrick, 2014). Alternatively, when care leavers are genuinely engaged in the decision-making process, broader positive developmental outcomes can occur, and the personal experience of young people can improve (Park et al., 2020). As described in Park et al.'s (2020) observations on the value of youth participation in decision-making during their transition to independence:

> Participation in decisions may be a significant protective factor for transition-age youth at a critical point in life that helps set the stage for their adult lives. By involving youth in the planning of interventions, both on the case-level (e.g., decisions about their specific case plan) and systems-level (e.g., child welfare program development and policymaking), youth may be provided opportunities for cognitive and skill development and incorporating their unique perspectives and expertise within decision making (p. 2).

Park et al. (2020) identifies essential elements that require consideration in order for care leavers to participate well in the decision-making process. They identify the importance of the key worker relationship to the care leaver, and an understanding of race, gender, and sexuality differentials on the part of those in formal support roles. They caution that the inclusion of youth voice in decision processes should not be offered in a prescribed fashion. Instead, authorities need to consider the unique circumstances of each young person including their care experience, age, maturity, gender, ethnic background, sexuality, and readiness for transition. The fundamental question is: What does appropriate participation look like for each care leaver?

Experts repeatedly emphasise the importance of adolescents being invited to practice personal agency by participating in decisions affecting their lives. Personal agency is defined as one's ability to self-direct, take responsibility for one's actions and life trajectory, and gain confidence amid life challenges (Lee & Berrick, 2014). As a young person's capacity and ability to make decisions is intrinsically linked to their ability to obtain and remain in stable accommodation, housing options for care leavers play a critical role in enabling youth to self-determine their future.

In New Zealand, formal recognition of the value and importance of care leavers exercising personal agency has been included in legislation. Recent changes to the Child, Young Persons, and Their Families (Oranga Tamariki) Legislation Act (1989) included Section 386AAC, inserted on 1 July 2019. This section, titled "386AAC Principles to be applied when assisting [a] young person to move to independence," (pp. 370-371) stressed the importance of offering New Zealand care leavers leadership and participation in matters affecting them during transition. It also specified the responsibility of the state to take a holistic approach; one which nurtures the young person's identity and strengths (Oranga Tamariki Act ,1989, pp. 370-371). However, the legislation fails to name housing and housing choice within its scope of assisting young people to independence. The issue is strangely absent from Section 386AAC, and only mentioned in passing within the Act as a whole.

Considering the links between the decision-making powers offered to young people leaving care in comparable jurisdictions and their housing stability, it seems that New Zealand legislation has not yet gone far enough in its intention to assist young people to independence. Although stable housing is widely viewed as an essential element of gaining independence, no legislative mandate exists to ensure its provision.

2.9.2 Ontological Security and the Importance of Housing for Care Leavers

Historically, housing researchers have a lot to say about the psycho-social benefits of housing. They frequently emphasise the importance of ontological security. Ontological security is "the confidence most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and the constancy of their social and material environments" (Giddens, 1991, p. 92). Such secure environments in everyday life enable the stability from which one's social relationships and community networks are established.

Dupuis & Thorn (1998) argued that finding a home can increase the likelihood of a person attaining ontological security, but only if it provides constancy, routine, freedom, and safety. As Diner (2019) notes:

Ontological security is based on the trust that individuals have in the world around them, as well as the consistency with which we expect to continue to experience this trust. To support the development of ontological security, home must therefore be constant so that we can have trust that it will remain the same and be reliably available for us (p. 30).

Care leavers' experiences of 'home' can be the opposite of those which foster ontological security. By the age of eight, most New Zealand children in care have been moved an average of seven times. Some of these children have been moved up to 60 times (Duff, 2018). Johnson et al. (2009) reported feelings of abandonment and distrust leading to ongoing struggles in care leavers' ability to sustain their tenancies. Common challenges affecting a care leaver's capacity to sustain their tenancies include substance abuse, prostitution, mental health distress, trauma and abuse in their care history and a lack of educational attainment (Johnson et al., 2010). Diner (2019) remarked that "housing tenure has a clear link to ontological security and a tenant's capacity to experience stable living arrangements (p. 30)."

Consequently, the role ontological security plays in the overall housing stability and progress for care leavers should not be overlooked when considering that one's home is the place of constancy and security from which one's identity and belonging are established (Johnson et al., 2010). With a history of constant movement, care leavers tend not to have significant social networks to depend upon during challenging times, especially transition. Therefore, in order to help rebuild trust, social capital, and community connectedness, it is critical to establish the opportunity for ontological security, via housing security, in care leaver services.

2.9.3 The Importance of Social Supports Alongside Accommodation Options

The importance of youth having supportive adult role models during their transition to adulthood is well-recognised and validated by young people and child welfare experts alike. The authors of the 'Oranga Tamariki Transition Cohort Needs Assessment Report' (2018) argued the following as critical for care leavers in New Zealand:

Most young people required some form of supported living going forward. The main types of accommodation required were flatting arrangements with weekly or daily check-ins (30%), 24 hour supported accommodation (25%) and supervised living

arrangements with access to on-call support (20%). The report went on to state that 'two in five lacked the presence of supportive adults in their lives (42%) (pp.7-8).

Similarly, in her New Zealand research, Yates (2000) observed the importance of adult supports in any accommodation choice:

> Overall, the most successful accommodation arrangements appear to have been those where there were adults are present or nearby in a supportive or supervisory role. Although the older participants had eventually begun to acquire good living skills, their early attempts at independent living were very risky. This was also true for those with substance and other behavioural issues (p. 153).

Moreover, a key worker can assist with care leavers' practical steps that lead not only to stable housing but also to better outcomes in education, health, employment, and parenting (Stein, 2019). Fauth et al. (2012) described the type of support needed for the care leaving cohort as proactive (i.e., not only for crisis management), flexible, able to respond to the diversity and variety of young people's needs, and holistic (addressing the practical, financial, and emotional needs of young people).

When these supports are in place, a young person is more likely to achieve their goals, as demonstrated by the UK Prince's Trust Fairbridge programme. Researchers reviewing the effectiveness of Fairbridge found compelling evidence to support the inclusion of key workers in transition services. They state that 98% of those surveyed reported that one-to-one sessions with advisers helped them achieve their goals. Following such consultations, Fairbridge staff commonly reported improvements in young people's communication skills, motivation, management of emotions, and understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses (Newson & Gibb, 2015).

There is a growing acknowledgment in New Zealand of the need for more robust supports to be included in transition services for care leavers. New Zealand's Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki) recommends that, for more stable transitions, planning and preparation for transition should happen while a young person is still in care and be followed by post-care support. Oranga Tamariki names a range of supports critical for care leavers to succeed including financial support, help for securing and retaining accommodation, emotional and mentoring support, facilitation of education and employment opportunities,

living-skills development, and support from the business community (Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre, 2018).

2.10   Conclusion

Despite recent attempts by the state to bolster support for care leavers in New Zealand, no comprehensive housing strategy exists to meet the current volume of young people leaving care. This is astonishing considering the vital role housing plays in enabling a young person a chance to step into independent living after care. Within policy, little is written about the importance of housing.

Likewise, it remains concerning that data and evidence on the housing journey for New Zealand care leavers is largely absent from academic literature and government reports. At best, government agencies can take an educated guess that housing is a priority for care leavers. But without data to support the need for housing, it may continue to be overlooked and fail to draw the immediate attention it requires. At worst, care leavers' housing needs will remain unheard and unmet, leaving youth vulnerable to housing instability after care and potentially without housing altogether.

Housing for care leavers cannot be viewed in isolation from other problematic issues care leavers face. The government needs to take into consideration the social support needs of care leavers that are distinct from other vulnerable groups, and the importance of their cultural needs, particularly for Māori.

This literature review highlights the importance of housing for care leavers, the kinds of support that need to accompany any housing strategies, and the importance of including care leavers in housing decisions that concern their future, especially the right to exercise self-determination on housing choice. The review also recognises the need to prioritise tailored responses to care leaver housing needs and the training and educational factors vital to preparing youth for independent living. If any progress is to be made on the housing journey for care leavers, there needs to be an admission from decision-makers regarding care leavers' vulnerability to homelessness. In addition, further investigation is required to establish whether it is adequate to have only one working youth housing model in the country

when considering the diverse needs of a complex cohort of youth. Without gaining further input from care leavers into future adjustments to housing supports, authorities could miss both obvious and subtle facts that are central to the needs of youth and critical to enabling successful post-care housing experiences. To respond effectively, the voice of care leavers themselves must be prioritised, and their views must hold weight for any future policy decisions. In doing so, New Zealand could take practical and tangible steps forward in offering tailored and bespoke housing solutions for care leavers, possibly preventing another generation of young people exiting care being left to fend for themselves.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

The research paradigm for this project is constructivist, and the methods of data collection chosen are photovoice and photo-elicitation, followed by semi-structured interviews.

Constructivism was chosen to assist the researcher to prioritise and capture perspectives of the project participants. Traditionally, constructivism is a paradigm that allows for active learning within its framework. The methods of photovoice and photo-elicitation were highly compatible with a constructivist paradigm and suited the researcher's commitment to a strengths-based approach with the participants (Johnson et al., 2010). The methods employed placed participants at the centre of the research, enabling them to articulate their preferences on accommodation choices through the data collection process.

The project adopts a democratic and equitable approach by actively involving participants in the research process, featuring their views without interference. The researcher drew on principles from participatory action research methodologies while engaging participants to conduct self-directed photovoice and photo-elicitation activities, through which they collected visual representations of their self-determined views on housing choice. Taken together, the project's methods allowed participants to reflect on the importance housing plays in their lives. This allowed participants to generate a visual record of their housing preferences in an uncensored way. The interviews that followed encouraged youth to reflect on their choices, using the images to guide them, although their answers were not limited to photo references alone.

Data was collected from ten young people aged 18-22 who had exited care and had lived in post-care dwellings for at least ninety days. Seven of the ten young people identified as rangatahi Māori, and eight were female.

3.2   Research Paradigm

Constructivism is based on the philosophy that people construct their knowledge and insights through learned experiences and create meaning as they reflect upon those experiences (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). It allows that participants learn through experience; the knowledge gained from their lives to date, and their reflection on it afterwards (Dickson et al., 2016). The philosophy of constructivism aligns well with the project's aims of leading ten participants through a process of considering their housing needs and housing choices as they transition into adulthood.

The process applied gave an opportunity for participants to exercise personal agency by placing value and emphasis on the self-determined views of each young person. In doing so, the project adopted a view of constructivism similar to one found in Schwandt's (2000) research. Schwandt (2000) asserts that a person's reality can be socially constructed as they make sense of their life experiences:

> In a fairly unremarkable sense, we are all constructivists if we believe that the mind is active in the construction of knowledge. Most of us would agree that knowing is not passive—a simple imprinting of sense data on the mind—but active; the mind does something with those impressions, at the very least forms abstractions or concepts. In this sense, constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it (p. 197).

Schwandt (2000) contends that knowledge is discovered through a process of forming a particular point of view and is substantively determined by the personal reflections and interpretation of the person implicated. Constructivism thus allows room for individual expression and diversity of thought on similar experiences by a particular group (in this case, care leavers). In this study, the researcher is seeking to uncover the perceived truth or meaning derived in the thoughts and opinions of young people, without scrutinising them against a set of objective facts. That is to say, through a constructivist lens, the researcher is working to discover individuals' views of and thoughts on the subject at hand. The positioning of the core research questions in this project, which seeks to unpack care leavers' self-determined views and choices about housing, align well with Schwandt's (2000) observations, giving credence to personal reflections and credibility to unique opinions in the process of data collection.

In this thesis, the researcher is not attempting to position housing choice or needs through the lens of market trends, available housing supply, suitability of housing for youth, or constraints in offering youth-specific housing. He is instead seeking to describe and analyse the unique, personal, and individual views of participants concerning their housing needs based on prior experience and hopes for the future. Ertmer and Newby (2013) remark that the validity of the constructivist paradigm is found in the authenticity of the individual journey:

> Constructivists do not deny the existence of the real world but contend that what we know of the world stems from our own interpretations of our experiences. Humans create meaning as opposed to acquiring it. Since there are many possible meanings to glean from any experience, we cannot achieve a predetermined, "correct" meaning. Learners do not transfer knowledge from the external world into their memories; rather they build personal interpretations of the world based on individual experiences and interactions (p. 55).

Adopting a constructivist paradigm enabled the researcher to foster an inclusive and accepting environment for care leavers. With constructivism guiding the approach throughout the data collection process, the researcher was well equipped to onboard participants through easy and accessible methods appropriately chosen for the project sample.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) identify five authenticity criteria for constructivist approaches to qualitative research which have been applied to this project:

1: Fairness and the commitment to respecting the unique interpretations of the subject at hand.
2: Enabling the participants to recognise their constructions of certain points of view and the complexities of the social environment surrounding them.
3: Respect and awareness for their own opinions and views of others.
4: The stimulation of self-determined contributions that place high value on the voice of participants.
5: The redistribution of power amongst participants, with room for actions to adapt during the inquiry (pp. 245-250).

A constructivist paradigm is suitable for this research project also because of the importance it places on equal and reciprocal relationships (Dickson et al., 2016). It allowed the researcher to work with participants to mutually create outcomes genuinely reflective of the participants' views and experiences while minimising the power imbalance between the two parties. By using the visual methods of photovoice and photo-elicitation alongside a semi-structured interview, participants were encouraged and enabled to respond to the questions in both visual and verbal ways and offer insights on their own terms. As the cohort of participants had experienced a multitude of past situations where they felt their voices and perspectives were not central or prioritised, the use of constructivism provided a contrast to these experiences through a process that was accessible, as well as empathetic to their perspectives.

The choice of constructivism as the research paradigm also aligns well with the best practice goals within the Youth Development Strategy of Aotearoa. These goals include prioritising a consistent strengths-based approach to any youth engagement, providing opportunities for youth to actively participate, and inviting youth to generate key information themselves (Ara Taiohi, 2011). The application of positive youth development principles is informed by the big picture on the subject at hand. It is implemented by contextualising the experience of young people against a backdrop of larger opportunities and challenges affecting them (Ara Taiohi, 2011). By listening to the participant's experience of housing and desire for change in their circumstances, the researcher was able to offer a space where participants could reflect on their housing journey in light of the wider youth housing dilemma facing care leavers across New Zealand.

Using Guba and Lincoln's (1989) second authenticity criteria, the researcher informed participants of the size of the youth housing challenge facing Oranga Tamariki and then asked for their opinion on possible solutions. The question used to enable young people to speak into the larger systems and structural challenges facing care leavers in their housing journey was as follows: " If you had the power to make changes to the current youth housing approach, what changes would you make and why?" By using a semi-structured interview method, the researcher was also able to issue follow-up questions to the one above to gather a full description from participants on the complexities of the social environment around them, and its effect on their housing journey overall.

In applying the youth development goals above, the researcher invited participants to share thoughts, views, and ideas that had been generated through their unique experiences without scrutiny or objection, thereby creating a safe environment for the self-discovery of knowledge and validating the importance of new insights generated throughout the process by the research participants themselves (Mogashoa, 2014).

3.3 Sample, Recruitment and Data Collection

3.3.1 Rationale for Recruitment

The researcher recruited participants through a strong network of relationships among Auckland-based youth housing and child welfare agencies in New Zealand. Due to the vulnerabilities of the chosen sample, key workers from each agency were enlisted to recruit young people from within their service. The method of recruitment was chosen to ensure that the research request was made to the young people by someone they could trust and respect. However, the researcher provided some robust guidelines for the recruitment process to ensure the participants could accept or decline the invitation with ease.

It was of fundamental importance to the project aims that youth had the right to exercise personal agency in their response to the invitation to participate. This commitment to honouring the young person's choices was not only an ethical requirement; it also enabled participants to engage with the research on their own terms.

3.3.2 Sample

The size of the sample group was informed by Fugard and Potts's (2015) research that recommends small projects interview between 6–10 participants. It was also influenced by the challenge of engaging vulnerable young people through multiple agencies within a set timeframe; in that context, engaging 10 participants (and no more) was a realistic goal. It was a manageable sample size given the scope of a master's thesis. Ten care leavers between the ages of 18-22 were recruited for the project. Each had experienced at least five years in care as well as ninety days in post-care housing environments. It was imperative that rangatahi Māori made up at least 30% of the cohort, because Māori are an overrepresented ethnic group amongst care leavers. Of the participants, four were young mothers, one identified as LGBTI-

Q, seven were Māori, two were Samoan, and one was Pākehā. The age range of the participants was 18-22 years old.

The project drew its participants from a range of care backgrounds with experiences including care placements with Oranga Tamariki, child welfare providers and whānau. The project excluded care leavers whose last placement was in secure residential care due to the current risk profile of young people exiting care from such settings, which distinguishes them from their peers as a unique cohort. The research locality was limited to care leavers living in Auckland, New Zealand, the researcher's home city. The researcher sought to recruit an even number of male and female participants, although the final gender mix of participants was 80% female and 20% male.

3.3.3 Sample Criteria

The most important criteria were minimum time in care (five years) and out of care (ninety days), which ensured relevant experience for engaging in the project. The length of time was chosen acknowledging that, currently, a long transitional placement is six to nine months, as advised by transition specialists from the referral agencies concerned. The researcher limited participation in the research to youth in the Auckland region. Although the researcher sought to recruit an even mix of male and female participants—booking eight interviews with each—three male participants failed to show to the initial information session, and another three disengaged from the project prior to data collection. The attrition rate experienced during recruitment was expected, but the higher level of attrition from potential male participants was less expected.

To allow as much rigor as possible for the project, the researcher was determined to obtain a sample size at the higher end of Fugard and Potts's (2015) recommendations (6-10 participants) and consequently spent more than twelve months in the field research stage recruiting participants and collecting the data.

3.3.4 Recruitment

To begin recruitment, the researcher sent several expressions of interest emails to a range of child welfare and housing agencies with known youth housing programmes in

Auckland city. With a significant number of networks to draw on due to his own work for Visionwest Community Trust, correspondence was initiated with twelve agencies and positive responses were received from five. The organisations who accepted the invitation to participate include Lifewise, Youth Horizons, Ma Te Huru Huru, Visionwest, and one other. The fifth organisation wished to remain anonymous. After the initial email engagement, responding agencies were given written information on how the project would be conducted, an approximate timeline, expectations, and ethical standards. The documentation included consent information for each organisation (Appendix B), a participant information form (Appendix C) participant consent material (Appendix D), and confidentiality documentation.

The written documentation requested that referring agencies introduce the researcher to a key worker in their organisation who could act as a liaison between the researcher and young person and as a guide for the young person during the research interactions. Each key worker was issued with a key worker information form explaining their role in the project (Appendix E). After agreeing to accompany a young person in the research process, the key worker was required to sign a key worker consent form (Appendix F) and a key worker confidentiality form (Appendix G). This approach meant that the young person was accompanied by a supportive adult (who was not the researcher) for the entire research engagement period who was committed to upholding the ethical standards outlined in the research recruitment documentation. It did add a resourcing burden on the participating agency, as they had an obligation to organise staff time around each interview, and in some cases this provision caused interviews to be delayed.

After the initial written interaction between the referring agency and the researcher, each agency, through their key workers, invited care leavers to participate in the research. The referring agencies were tasked with supporting the young person to understand that their involvement in the research was purely voluntary and that they had the freedom to participate or reject the invitation altogether. The researcher included a note in the written request for each participant's autonomy to be respected by the referring organisations.

To contextualise the latter, each referring agency and key worker were asked to commit to the New Zealand Youth Work Code of Ethics clause pertaining to a young person's right to decision-making. The clause states: "Youth workers, as part of the young person's wider community, seek to empower young people, ensuring they have a greater say

in decisions that affect them and the world around them (Ara Taiohi, 2011, p. 37)." The researcher highlighted the clause in his approach to all referring agencies, to ensure that any power imbalance between care leavers and agencies was acknowledged upfront.

3.3.5   Difficulties Experienced

The recruitment stage of the research was far from straightforward. Despite the researcher's strong sector relationships with several care agencies, securing their commitment to support the research was incredibly difficult. The day-to-day workloads of the agencies, and the circumstances of their care leavers, made interview requests difficult to fulfil.

Moreover, the difficulty in connecting and partnering with referring agencies underwent significant disruption and delay due to the research timing coinciding with the March 2020 Covid-19 Lockdown in New Zealand. The limitations on personal movement during the lockdown impacted the researcher's ability to engage with participants face-to-face and significant time was lost as a result. The participating agencies were understandably stretched during the time the researcher sought to conduct the research, and the disruptions to the agencies by the Covid-19 interruptions in 2020 had a significant bearing on the willingness of young people to engage with the research.

Those agencies that did refer often cancelled interviews at the eleventh hour due to behavioural challenges with the young people. Reasons for cancellations included criminal activity by the young person, new employment opportunities that clashed with interview times, loss of contact with the young person, participants declining to engage at the last minute, and no-shows at the time of scheduled interviews. A total of six interviews with young males were cancelled, reducing the gender balance of the final project sample.

Due to multiple failed attempts to recruit participants, the researcher decided to re-submit the ethics proposal with an additional incentive component for recruitment so as to appeal more personally to the targeted cohort. The committee agreed that, in a Covid context, an appropriate incentive could be introduced, provided it did not become an inducement. After approval, the researcher recommenced the recruitment process, offering each young person a meal and a $25 gift voucher as an acknowledgement of their participation. With the

newly introduced incentives in place, the researcher was able to recruit the full number of participants.

3.3.6 Data Collection Process

The data collection methods for the project, which are described in detail in a separate section below, were photovoice, photo elicitation and semi-structured interviews. Following a face-to-face information session with potential participants to confirm participation and to review and sign the project's consent form, the young people taking part in the study met with the researcher accompanied by their key worker. The purpose of the meeting was to complete the photovoice and photo-elicitation activities and to take part in an audio-recorded semi-structured interview.

Each participant was briefed on the photovoice activity before spending up to one hour capturing images in the local area. The photovoice activity was immediately followed by the semi-structured interview. The interview included a photo-elicitation activity within it, enabling participants to arrange and prioritise their images in relationship to their housing needs and preferences.

During each interview, participants shared views on housing using feedback from their photovoice experience and insights from the photo-elicitation activity. At the end of each interview, the researcher transcribed the recording. The interviews took place in confidential settings at the premises of participating organisations. No interview commenced without the presence of a key worker from the referring agency alongside each young person.

3.3.7 Cultural Considerations

The project was designed to involve several rangatahi Māori who had experienced significant time in care and were now navigating life in post-care accommodation. Therefore, careful thought was given to how the research would be undertaken through a cultural lens appropriate for Māori. After some consideration, and in consultation with his cultural supervisor, the researcher adopted the Te Ara Tika Māori Ethical Framework to inform the research (Hudson, 2010).

The framework is based on four tikanga principles: Whakapapa (relationships), tika (research design), manaakitanga (cultural and social responsibility), and mana (justice and equity). Whakapapa in this context speaks of the establishment and maintenance of meaningful relationships between the researcher and participants. Tika acted as the guide to ensure that the research was designed appropriately with a right fit for rangatahi. The researcher was informed by specific tikanga (custom, practice) including methods such as kanohi-ke-te-kanohi (face-to-face) interactions which influenced the design of the project.

The principle of manaakitanga guided the researcher to ensure that the participants' whakarangatira (dignity) was upheld throughout the entire interview process and in subsequent written evaluations. To honour the principle of manaakitanga, interviews took place in environments chosen by the rangatahi in consultation with their key worker from the referring agency, and kai (food) was provided by the researcher in keeping with standard tikanga (customs).

Protecting the mana (equity and justice) of each participant was top of mind for the researcher while exploring rangatahi needs and views throughout each interview. The commitment to mana tangata (human rights) ensured that the rangatahi always had, and maintained, autonomy in relationship to the research. Mana tangata gave the rangatahi the right to withdraw, or to decline the invitation to participate in any aspect of the research at any time. The principle of mana tangata, and others within the Te Ara Tika were applied to all participants, not just those of Māori decent.

Applying Te Ara Tika ensured that the voice of rangatahi was heard and respected by the researcher. It aligned with the core values of the Youth Development Strategy of Aotearoa and the New Zealand Youth Work Code of Ethics which prioritise the cultural identities and connections young people may have, and tipped the balance of power to favour the young person (Ara Taiohi, 2011). It was also supported by a fully transparent and open approach to the rangatahi, whereby the purpose, value, and implications of project participation was explained both verbally and in written form (Hudson, 2010).

The Māori principle of kia tūpato (to be careful) underpinned all interactions between the researcher and participants, ensuring that respect and care informed each and every interaction with participants. The researcher presented project information with honesty and

transparency, equipping potential participants with the full knowledge required to kia ata-whiriwhiri (consciously determine) their involvement on their terms. Where consent was granted for participation, the researcher moved forward with care ensuring rangatahi could exercise kia ata-haere (proceed with understanding) and respecting the place of self-determination for each participant throughout the interview process (Hudson, 2010). Kia ata-whakaaro (precise analysis) was applied to ensure participants knew and understood the benefit of their participation.

To uphold the principles of Te Ara Tika, the researcher was guided and supported by Fred Astle, who served as the project's cultural supervisor. Fred is a Māori academic and the Pou Tumu Whakarae Māori (Head of Māori Service Development) at Visionwest Community Trust. He holds the honorary role of Director of Kaupapa Māori at the University of Auckland's Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences. The cultural considerations applied in the research were grounded by supervision and guidance from Fred throughout the research journey. Fred provided advice to the researcher via monthly cultural check ins, and practical tips for face-to-face interactions during research interviews. He also reviewed each section of the thesis offering guidance and input on content pertaining to Māori.

3.3.8   Ethical Considerations

This project was reviewed and approved by Unitec's Research Ethics Committee, which is accredited by the Health Research Council (approval 2020-1003). The proposal outlined how the research would be conducted in a way that protected and respected the rights, ethnicities, reputations, and requests of participating young people. Additionally, the proposal acknowledged the possible sensitivity of participants recounting past care-placement experiences, culturally-oriented experiences which may differ across participants , and any vulnerabilities associated with homelessness and transience likely to be revealed during the interview process.

The ethics proposal also sought to consider the younger age of participants and take care to ensure that their dignity and confidentiality were respected. To ensure robustness in the process protecting the interests and wishes of each young person, the researcher obtained consent to participate from not only the young person, but also the key worker and referring organisation.

Participants were given the choice to opt out at any stage during their involvement in the research. If a participant were to choose to withdraw from the research, all information relating to the withdrawn participant would be deleted and no longer feature in the final work. Although no participants withdrew, it was important they were informed of this option and its provisions.

The researcher made every effort to ensure that participants' identities remained confidential. Pseudonyms are used when describing participants' views in this thesis. In addition, participants were briefed to exclude photos of themselves in any of the photovoice images taken during the data collection activity part of the project. If people known to the young person were photographed as part of the photovoice activity, the researcher and young person ensured their images were non-identifiable. Any identifiable images taken during data collection parts of the research were subsequently destroyed. Furthermore, in order to protect privacy, participants were asked to steer clear of photographing any housing environments identifiable through street names, letterbox numbers or vehicle license plates.

3.4   Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

3.4.1   Photovoice

Photovoice is a community-based participatory action research (PAR) method of data collection that puts a camera in the hands of research participants and invites them to visually capture the change they want to see in their lives. It was proposed for the first time by researchers Wang and Burris (1994), who recognised the value of utilising photographic imagery as a prompt to guide and inform verbal responses. Wang and Burris contend that photovoice allows researchers to achieve a significant level of exploration into community issues, aiding the researcher to gather comprehensive insights during data collection. They propose that photovoice is a dynamic and democratic way of offering vulnerable groups a voice into issues affecting themselves and the community around them.

Since its development in 1994, the method of photovoice has been widely recognised as a useful participatory action research method when engaging with vulnerable communities, aiding in the identification of fresh and authentic perspectives on subjects critical to

wellbeing (Budig et al., 2018). PAR is chiefly concerned with the democratisation and growth of research participants' knowledge as part of pursuits of social justice (Liebenberg, 2018). Its purpose is to foster opportunities for action, participation, access, empowerment, and capacity building amongst community members engaged in research (Vollman et al., 2004).

The current research draws upon PAR methodology to afford agency to a group of care leavers, offering them an opportunity to express their own views on their housing needs and placing those views at the centre of the project. Photovoice helped ensure participants were resourced to produce data that are true to their views and authentically representative of their experience.

Photovoice aligns well with a constructivist paradigm, particularly for research involving youth. Using visual methods also enabled participants to respond creatively, reducing limitations associated with exclusively verbal approaches to data collection during the interview stage of the project. Regarding the value of photovoice as a participatory method when conducting research with youth, Strack (2004) writes:

> A process such as photovoice provides youth the opportunity to develop their personal and social identities and can be instrumental in building social competency. Youth should and need to be given the opportunity to build and confirm their abilities, to comment on their experiences and insights, and to develop a social morality for becoming a positive agent within their communities and society (p. 49).

Photovoice also supports the New Zealand Youth Work Code of Ethics principle of empowering young people to shape their lives by having a say in decisions that affect their future (Ara Taiohi, 2011).

By placing a camera in the hands of each participant and offering them an opportunity to demonstrate their housing needs in visual form, photovoice facilitated an opportunity for participants in this project to shape their views of housing need and housing choice with autonomy and without interference from the researcher. As Liebenberg (2018) argues:

> Images prompt a different kind of reflection on lived experiences. First, images are able to prompt emotions and thoughts about experiences in ways that narrative alone cannot. Furthermore, the act of interpreting an image creates a slower and more

critically reflective space within the research process. This reflection may begin with the making of an image: "why is it that I made that photograph, in that moment?" But reflection also happens while participants think about the meaning they attach to images: "what am I seeing in this image?", "why is it important?", and "how do I understand or interpret what I am seeing?" Collectively then, images introduced into… research create important links that participants can use to more critically reflect on their lived experiences and to more accurately discuss and share these experiences with others (p. 4).

Camera phones were sourced through the researcher's employer or one of the participating organisations. Participants were given freedom to express their views through a collection of abstract and symbolic and/or literal accommodation images appealing to their personal preferences. Each of the photos was accompanied by a written explanation from the young person describing how the image reflected an element of preferred accommodation choice for them. These images constituted significant pieces of content for the next steps in the data collection process.

3.4.2 Photo-Elicitation

Photo-elicitation is a qualitative research method that utilises photographs to prompt participant responses to the subject. By engaging participants in photo-elicitation, a researcher creates space for active and unencumbered commentary sparked by the meaning in a photograph or series of images (Bugus et al., 2014). Fanning (2011) describes the value of adopting photo-elicitation in qualitative research: "it is important to stress that photo-elicitation it is not about a photograph but the right photograph; the right photograph is one that has the ability to create an interactive conversation through well-crafted questions (p. 180)."

In this research, photo-elicitation was utilised as a method to empower the young people to describe accommodation options in a focused way during the semi-structured interview. Photos for this activity were selected from those taken during the photovoice activity. One to three photos were chosen by each young person from a larger selection of images that visually described their strongest housing desires and most closely resembled—literally or figuratively—their preferences regarding housing choice. The participants were given time to reflect on the images, without interference or commentary from the researcher. The use of the photo-elicitation activity helped participants to apportion value to each image

taken during the photovoice activity, enabling them to prioritise images in order of importance. Additionally, the use of visual aids while interviewing young people promotes a stronger rapport between the participant and researcher, enabling richer responses from the participant (Meo, 2010).

Photo-elicitation techniques are used in research with children and young people and are regularly highlighted as advantageous methods for gaining stronger participant voice in qualitative data sets. In research from Raby et al. (2018), this point is affirmed:

> Participant-generated photo-elicitation is attractive for adults interested in research with young people because the influence of the participants appears to offer a counterweight to both the unequal relationship between researcher and researched and the added inequalities between adults and young people (p.1).

Photo-elicitation for the current project offered participants the unique opportunity to represent their housing needs and choices using symbolic and abstract photographs, helping them to uncover themes which they verbalised while explaining the meaning behind each image. All participants chose to engage in the photo activities using both literal and metaphorical images. Applying photographic methods, and including abstract representations, added several layers of meaning within the data set, as discussed in detail in the Findings chapter. Photo-elicitation specifically helped to capture the 'essence' of participants' housing needs and its intrinsic value in their lives, revealing insights that may not have been possible to uncover without the use of visual methods.

3.4.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are usually comprised of a predetermined list of open-ended questions that can guide the researcher to explore a topic within an individual or group setting (Jamshed, 2014). While the predetermined list of questions acts as a guide to keep the interview on topic, the open-ended nature of the questions allows room for the researcher to explore the subject in depth with subsequent follow-up questions that may vary from one participant to the next (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviewing is widely recognised as a useful tool for qualitative research to facilitate opportunities for more comprehensive conversations with participants (Alshenqeeti, 2014). The fluid interview

approach allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' views, experiences, and motivations.

Individual interviews were chosen instead of focus groups to ensure that the researcher could differentiate subtle and major differences in opinion on housing amongst the participants, without interviewees being swayed by their peers in a group setting (Gill et al., 2008). Because the interviews allowed for a strong degree of interaction, the researcher was able to probe for clear and complete answers from participants and could broaden the focus and scope of questioning as new topics relevant to housing emerged.

Semi-structured interviewing complemented and deepened the data captured during the photovoice and photo-elicitation activities. Interviews lasted between 30-45 minutes each, and covered the participants' previous experience of housing. While a core set of questions were prepared to create a standard interview structure (see Appendix H), the semi-structured nature of the interview also allowed opportunities for discussions to deepen around specific insights unique to each participant, in keeping with a constructivist paradigm.

The opportunity for such insights is described well by Adams (2015):

Conducted conversationally with one respondent at a time, the semi-structured interview employs a blend of closed- and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions. The dialogue can meander around the topics on the agenda—rather than adhering slavishly to verbatim questions as in a standardised survey—and may delve into totally unforeseen issues (p. 493).

Adams (2015) contends that semi-structured interviews are useful in instances where researchers need to examine new territory on important issues that require participants to attempt to offer broad and/or previously unknown insights on a given topic. The method of interviewing was chosen in part because little is known or recorded about New Zealand care leavers' self-determined views on housing, or their individual candid insights on accommodation choice.

The scope of interview questions covered not only current housing preference, but also participants' views of their prior experiences of post-care transitional housing placements, in an effort to uncover specific details of their housing experience so far. First, participants were asked to name positive and limiting experiences of housing and to describe

their journey with housing up until the present time. These background questions were followed by specific questions relating to the photos captured during the photovoice activity, and then insights gained through the photo-elicitation exercise.

The questions posed around the images sought to reveal both literal and symbolic interpretations of the photos. Questions about the meanings of their photos offered participants the opportunity to express themselves and their views and desires on housing without specifically asking them to categorise or limit their responses. The photo-oriented questions produced answers from participants that covered both literal and emotional needs.

Finally, the questions sought to understand how participants would like to exercise their rights and views on housing in the future. Overall, interview questions sought to reveal the full spectrum of housing needs and preferences within the participant group, covering both housing options and the supports associated with those options. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher, incorporating the data supplied through the photovoice techniques and photo-elicitation process. Each interview was recorded on a voice recording device to ensure transcription accuracy. A full description of the interview questions can be found in Appendix H.

3.4.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was chosen as the data analysis method for this project due to its flexibility, accessibility, and suitability for qualitative research (Braun & Clarke 2006). Braun and Clarke (2012) define thematic analysis as follows:

> Thematic Analysis (TA) is a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into, patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset. Through focusing on meaning across a dataset, TA allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences. Identifying unique and idiosyncratic meanings and experiences found only within a single data item is not the focus of TA. This method, then, is a way of identifying what is common to the way a topic is talked or written about, and of making sense of those commonalities (p. 57).

The use of thematic analysis allowed the researcher to make sense of the position and priority of housing in the minds of the research participants as a group (or as members of significant sub-groups). While recording idiosyncratic responses from each participant was

important and helps convey the diversity of individual views and opinions throughout the research, the analysis of the data collected focused on shared themes and threads in keeping with Braun and Clarke's six step process (as described below). This approach offered the researcher a clear process to follow identifying patterns and meta-themes in the data before analysing the differences between and similarities among (shared) participant responses.

Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to identify and organise surface level, verbalised semantic themes. However, it also enabled the researcher to explore in detail what was said and allowed for themes that were not initially obvious but more implicit in the data to be identified. In other words, latent themes were part of the analysis undertaken.

Data were analysed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process. The steps are as follows:

1: Familiarising oneself with the data.
2: Transcribing, reading, and re-reading, and noting down ideas; generating initial codes, which includes highlighting interesting features in the data and collating data into code labels.
3: Searching for themes, which involves generating thematic maps based on initial coding.
4: Reviewing themes to ensure that they are accurately identified and representative of the data.
5: Defining and naming themes to accurately convey the body of information they represent, while avoiding repetition and maintaining a unique distinction between themes.
 6: Producing the report, ensuring consistency with thematic analysis principles by reviewing each of the initial five steps (pp. 16-23).

 The process required the researcher to fully immerse himself in the data. The approach was to transcribe the recordings of the semi-structured interviews verbatim, paying attention to every detail, and patiently attending to participants' responses while remaining open to any latent themes emerging from reflections on the data by the participants, especially the photos. Braun and Clarke (2006) write that the simple act of transcribing interviews can be seen as an interpretive act in and of itself, i.e., as more than merely a mechanical exercise (p. 17). The researcher adopted this view during the transcribing stage and found the full immersion into the interview recordings illuminating and stimulating for the initial coding exercise that would follow.

After the transcription phase, the researcher invested time in understanding the key points within each interview, highlighting significant comments associated with the research questions and drafting possible codes in the margins of the text. Next, and before comprehensive coding could begin, the researcher needed to review and familiarise himself with the photos taken during the photovoice activity and analysed by participants using photo-elicitation techniques. The researcher reviewed the photos from all ten participants, as well as their personal accounts surrounding the images. As promoted by Nikiforuk et al.'s (2011) recommendations for the use of photovoice:

> It is the combination of the narrative and visual depictions that enhances the ability of researchers to accurately capture the meaning of an issue from the participant's point of view. The resulting photo stories become a potentially rich platform from which researchers can offer a nuanced understanding of community issues to the scientific community – an advance that can inform appropriate intervention or action on health and social problems (p. 3).

3.5.   The Three Categories

As the researcher investigated the data within the transcriptions and photos from the interviews, it became clear that three categories would be needed to code the information effectively. The first category was named 'the participants' housing journey.' The researcher used the housing journey mode to plot and record all verbal references to housing from the interviews including past, present, and future views as described by each participant.

The second category was named 'the role of housing.' This allowed the researcher to plot and record all verbal references to the importance and role of housing, or the lack thereof, in each participant's experience.

The third category was 'the visual narrative.' Here key information about visual data was recorded and plotted. The visual category ensured that the researcher captured a distinct set of inputs and information gathered specifically around participants' explanations of the photos taken as part of the data collection process.

After becoming familiar with the data, and by using the three categories, the researcher began to generate codes and to record information within each of the categories. The researcher used an inductive method of analysing the data, ensuring that the initial coding was completed without trying to place the data into pre-existing theoretical frameworks (Braun et al., 2019). The inductive approach allowed semantic codes to be established that could clearly be referenced back to explicit meaning and language used by participants to describe their journeys (Braun et al., 2019).

After using an inductive method and producing semantic codes for the initial code generation, the researcher applied a deductive approach and theoretical framing that sought to investigate the data based on more latent themes sitting within and around individual explanations. Such themes may not have been described in words alone but were instead overall messages contained in the substantive and complete responses from each participant, which were often repeated using different terms throughout the interviews.

3.5.1   The First Category: Housing Journey

For the first category of the participants' "housing journey", the researcher began noticing and collating responses that included all previous, present, and desired experiences of housing. The experiences recorded using this category included in-care housing, post-care housing, and current housing experiences. To reveal the participants' views of future housing options, the researcher sought to understand the desired housing choices of participants, as described by them, and the role housing played in their transition journeys out of foster care.

Coding with a thematic approach enabled the researcher to plot the lived experience of the participants and contrast it with the desired experience of housing that they sought for themselves and others. However, the analysis of the housing journey did not by itself provide adequate room to explore the psychosocial, psychological, and cultural needs of the participants in relationship to housing.

3.5.2   The Second Category: Role of Housing

The second category named the "role of housing" was applied to capture codes relating to the emotional and social dynamics participants evidenced in relation to their

housing journeys, and how they spoke about future supports that recognised their psychosocial and psychological needs concerning housing in the future. The approach sought to recognise the comprehensive motivations around housing choice for participants, extending beyond literal choices alone and exploring more nuanced drivers of those choices to render a more complete narrative of their views.

3.5.3 The Third Category: Visual Narrative

The third category was formed to code the participants' descriptions of their photos during the semi-structured interviews. Based on insights drawn from the images, the researcher coded photos into a separate visual category that could be utilised as a distinct data set, while reinforcing and strengthening verbal arguments where appropriate. The visual narrative category was then cross-referenced against the data within the first and second categories to strengthen and challenge arguments throughout.

The researcher utilised Microsoft Excel to arrange the data manually, using colour coding to link insights within the three categories of the participants' housing journey, the role of housing, and their visual narratives.

The codes themselves were generated with clear labels to host chunks of data pertinent to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The labels for codes were then categorised where similarities emerged to support the researcher's search for common themes. After coding data within the three categories, the researcher returned to the source material (the transcribed interviews) to re-check the codes against the raw data set. To ensure accuracy, a thorough re-checking and cross-referencing of the data was then undertaken one final time.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1   Introduction

The Findings Chapter presents the results from data collected through photovoice, photo-elicitation, and semi-structured interview methods utilised for this project. Eight key themes will be discussed in detail below. Each theme surfaced after the researcher created codes through the transcribing process—noting similar and repetitive responses in the data set—before organising them within three categories. The categories were named "the housing journey," "the role of housing," and "visual narrative."

As discussed in the Methodology chapter, these categories were generated to accurately differentiate the literal housing journey of the research participants from the wider role of housing in their lives (allowing for latent themes to emerge alongside semantic ones), and from the visual representation of desired housing for each participant.

The research process employed allowed the researcher to explore the views of participants using a constructivist paradigm, giving each individual an opportunity to learn and reflect on their experience of housing. Such reflections offered each young person insights on what they desired for their housing journey as care leavers, placing them and their voices at the centre of the research (Johnson et al., 2010).

The photos taken in the photovoice activities have cut across all eight themes and have been included in their subsequent analysis. Therefore, the photos are included within most themes described in this chapter and add another layer of depth and understanding to the project's written data. In the process, the researcher has paid careful attention to the way photos are interpreted, ensuring that verbatim quotes relating to each photo accompany them within this chapter. Above all, the researcher has been fastidious in taking care not to add or take away from participants' own interpretations of their photos.

Each participant had the opportunity to individually voice their desire for change in how youth housing is delivered during a care leaver's journey in New Zealand. The researcher found it astounding that most of the participants had neither been consulted nor asked directly, at any time, about what housing options they felt would best suit their needs.

For many participants, the interview for this project was the first time they experienced someone being willing to listen to their views on this subject and take time to understand their unique circumstances and needs in relation to it.

Despite the diversity of experience, background, ethnicity, and gender amongst participants, there were many common responses regarding what housing support would look like if it was designed with their views in mind.

Themes that emerged across the group included a longing for greater stability in their housing circumstances, the desire for longer-term supports (including cultural support) and more permanent and independent housing options, rural placements close to nature, practical training to live independently, and a higher prioritisation of youth in housing policy from decision-makers. These themes represent the most repeated and emphasised priorities from participants when responding to the main research question, namely: what could self-determined housing options look like for care leavers in New Zealand?

4.2   Description and Demographics of Participants:

Each young person contributed by telling their unique story and offering insights on their future housing choices. Participants had been housed at locations across the city including urban apartments in the CBD, motels, and emergency housing units in South Auckland, East Auckland, and West Auckland.

At the time of the interviews, some participants were placed in living situations with wider family which, in many cases, were the same locations from which they had been uplifted years earlier. Each young person was enthusiastic about sharing their views on how care leavers are treated in relation to housing. However, throughout the interviews, participants needed encouragement to imagine housing outcomes different from their prior experience and initially struggled to see alternative housing options in their future.

It was clear from the beginning of each interview that each participant viewed housing as a critical issue for their journey out of care. A young tāne participant Lance commented:

They took me out of my house when I was small, and they moved me around…took me out of all these houses. Now it's their responsibility to give me a house… my own house! You took me outta all my other ones so now it's your responsibility to give me one!

Lance's sentiment was echoed by the other participants. Most of them shared his belief that more needed to be done to provide appropriate housing for care leavers. While opinions on what solutions should be employed differed within the group, the overwhelming view was that positive and urgent action on youth housing was required.

Table 1 contains the demographic profiles of the participants, including their housing situations at the time the interviews took place.

Table 1

AGE	18 yrs	19 yrs	20 yrs	22yrs	
	20% (2 participants)	50% (5 participants)	20% (2 participants)	10% (1 participant)	
GENDER	Male	Female			
	20% (2 participants)	80% (8 participants)			
ETHNICITY	Māori	Samoan	Pākehā		
	70% (7 participants)	20% (2 participants)	10% (1 participant)		
DEPENDENTS	With Children	Without Children			
	40% (4 participants)	60% (6 participants)			
SEXUALITY	LGBTIQ				
	10% (1 participant)				
HOUSING SITUATION	Motels	Family Placements	NGO Supported Living	Independent Living	Boarding
	30% (3 participants)	20% (2 participants)	20% (2 participants)	20% (2 participants)	10% (1 participant)

4.3   The Themes

4.3.1   Gaining Stability

The theme of gaining stability encapsulates a widely voiced and repeatedly emphasised priority in relation to preferred housing arrangements for all the participants interviewed. In response to questions about desired housing choice, participants were preoccupied by how safe and stable any housing placement might be, overwhelmingly citing

stability as their strongest need. The responses on stability combined subthemes on the topics of personal safety, security of tenure, and privacy from others.

Although participants could point to the significance of housing stability, some found it easier than others to articulate what it would look like. Atawhai, a young wāhine Māori mother, used terms like "grounded" and "planted somewhere" to describe what stable housing would offer her. When asked to expand on the meaning of the term stable, other participants used the words "settled, secure, and safe" on multiple occasions.

The concept of stability for female participants was synonymous with the level of safety and security they felt in their living circumstances. Each participant struggled to separate one word from the other, depicting stability, safety, privacy and security as one. The merging of safety, privacy and security into a general theme of stability was most clearly evident amongst responses generated from the four mothers in the group. Jenny, a nineteen-year-old Pākehā mum, used a photo of a locked gate to depict her longing for stability:

> So this one is of a gate, so when I get my own house one day I want my son to be running around so, I don't want to be in a place where there is no gate. A place where we can be secure and safe.

Rāwiri, a young 18-year-old tāne Māori, expressed feelings of dismay and disillusionment with finding stability in housing. Unlike his female peers, Rāwiri struggled to elucidate what stability would look like for him:

> Fuck knows. I wouldn't know what stability looks like even if I saw it. I have never had a stable situation, so I wouldn't know. So yeah, to be honest, I wouldn't know

what a stable situation looks like cause I have never had that situation…I have had it. But I have blown it. So yeah. So I guess I have never really had it.

The longing for stability was invariably linked to constant movement during years in care placements at multiple locations. In that light, it makes sense that participants yearned for housing that offered stability and safety, something they had not previously experienced in abundance.

Crystal, a young wāhine Māori, used the word 'privacy' to give voice to her longing for safe and stable accommodation. She verbalised the importance of finding accommodation away from what she perceived as the dangers of strangers. Crystal visualised her need for privacy and safety using an image of a high fenced and gated property, saying: "Yeah privacy, where you are away from the world. You don't have to worry about what's going to happen. Whether you are going to live today and die tomorrow. That type of thing."

Atawhai, a 20-year-old wāhine, expressed her need for stability through the photovoice activity by photographing a large, solid brick home. She explained the photograph's meaning:

So my first picture is of a house. It's a two storied brick house with a lot of glass. It's a big house. Big enough to fit my family in there. Umm, this here shows and tells me stability. Like to be grounded. To be planted somewhere. Yeah, that's what that represents to me.

Although not always stated explicitly, participants drew a significant connection between their need for safety and their concerns around privacy. After having their privacy threatened in previous placements, they wanted safe shelter. Participants regularly alluded to their personal safety being compromised while in care. While general references to safety were common throughout the interviews, it's priority in the data was strengthened by subtle and implicit references which often returned the interview to issues surrounding a participant's physiological needs.

As participants reflected on their prior housing experiences, there was a palpable mood of regret. This regret was compounded by the absence of any experience in a permanent home. All ten participants naturally correlated their constant movement in care during childhood and their current unstable housing circumstances after being discharged from care. They believed that their current uncertainty with housing was influenced significantly by housing instability in their past.

Interestingly, the reflections from youth on frequent stints in unstable accommodation were consistent with international trends. Kilkenny's (2012) UK research suggests that experiences of housing displacement in care could increase the likelihood of housing instability after exiting care. Care leavers in Australia have also voiced regular experiences of housing instability, alongside inadequate support services to obtain and maintain housing (Beauchamp, 2014).

Table 2 (below) plots the housing movements for each participant while within care against their housing movements after being discharged from care. For most participants, housing instability has been ever-present in their housing experience and unrelenting over the course of their lives. Unfortunately for most, exiting care has not led to greater housing

stability. Instead, stated plainly, there has been a continuation, consistently across the group, of a life of multiple movements and unstable housing. Only three out of ten participants had seen a significant reduction in their movements after care, while the other seven participants continued to stumble from place to place.

Table 2

Participant Pseudonym	In-care Housing Movement	Post-care Housing Movement
Atawhai	>10 times in the last decade	5 times in 12 months
Aroha	>10 times in 20 years	5 times in 5 years
Jenny	10 times within the last decade	3 times in 12 months
Nora	9 times in 15 years	7 times in 2 years
Leoni	5 times within the last decade	5 times in 2 years
Bianca	10 times in 12 years	2 times in 4 years
Rāwiri	>10 times in 5 years	6 times in less than 12 months
Crystal	10 times in 5 years	1 time in 12 months
Lance	>10 times in 10 years	2 times in 12 months
Jess	9 places in 10 years	>10 times within 12 months

Seventy percent of participants experienced 10 or more placements in care, and five or more living locations after leaving care (within 12-18 months of being discharged).

While the research questions did not focus on care placements specifically, participants struggled to express their future housing needs without considering past experiences in the care system. In their efforts to describe what housing support should look like, participants regularly drew on their prior housing experience in care (and also in post-care) environments. Their lack of housing security during care was a widely voiced sub-theme of their expressed longing and desperation for stability in their future housing choice.

The descriptions of constant movement by participants could be traced back to early childhood and the ongoing inability to gain any sustained ontological security. The significance of ontological security was outlined and reinforced in the literature review and emphasised the importance for care leavers of finding constancy in their post-care material and social environments (Johnson et al., 2010). There was a clear alignment between the appeal from participants for more stable living environments and the descriptions of

ontological security from Johnson et al. (2010), which emphasised the importance of continuity of place.

When asked about her prior experience in housing, Jess, a nineteen-year old wāhine Māori, described her experience in this way:

> It was fucked, it was frightening. It was really like uneasy. It was scary at some stages just being in a different place with a lot of people. And, it didn't feel like, at first it didn't really feel like home. You know, it didn't feel like, very welcoming to be honest, yeah. It was scary. Very scary.

Bianca, an eighteen-year-old Samoan female, described the constant moving in her experience:

> Oh my gosh, I don't even know. Too many times. Too many times. I could just tell you that I have never ever been to one school for like… I have always had a new school every year. That's what I could tell you. You can make that whatever you think.

Participants expressed a desire for stability by describing a home where they could put down their roots and establish lasting relationships. They also expressed a wider psychological need for housing security. This included how safe they felt in a dwelling. Participants had concerns about peer flatting, citing the lack of trust they had in those they were housed alongside and the impact congregate placements had on their stability. No participants were given an opportunity to choose who their flatmates might be. Hence, a peer flatting environment may have been met with more optimism if youth were afforded the authority to decide who lives there. Still, this query would require further investigation to validate or dismiss as a more desirable version of supported accommodation.

Aroha, a twenty-two-year-old wāhine Māori, began the conversation about post-care housing expressing her regret at having never being given a choice about where she lived. Instead she described, with heightened emotion, the personal impact of feeling dumped on her older sister's doorstep after being discharged from care in 2017. Aroha's experience mirrors that of her care-leaving peers in the United States, who described exits from care as unplanned and rushed (McCoy et al., 2008). Youth in the United States also used the term 'dumped' to describe their experience.

Aroha already knew her ability to live harmoniously with her sister was severely strained. She had a history of family relationship breakdowns and felt it was inevitable that a similar episode would reoccur. When a conflict ensued several weeks later, followed by another unreconcilable fight with her sister, Aroha was left with nowhere to go. Consequently, she found herself on the streets for eight months, sleeping in bus-stops and scrounging for food.

During the interview, Aroha shared openly about her homelessness experience, describing a period when her life was threatened daily. The severity of Aroha's fear on the streets led her to carry a knife. She maintained that the importance of safety in her housing choices and the need for stronger social worker support were essential, and could not be left to chance. Aroha advocated vehemently for a higher care exit age, her suggestion was 21 years. She saw the extension of care as a housing option in and of itself. From Aroha's perspective, few care leavers are ready to leave care at 18 as per current policy in New Zealand and are totally underprepared for independent living.

Aroha is not alone in her view; McCoy et al. (2008) advocates for raising the age for leaving care in the United States. Child welfare experts have made similar arguments for a rise of the care leaver age in New Zealand (Newson & Gibb, 2015). Although not available to Aroha at her point of transition, or experienced by any of the other participants, New Zealand has now adopted a clause (Section 386AAD) in the legislation entitling care leavers to live with a caregiver up to the age of 21 as part of its transition support service (Oranga Tamariki Act, 1989, pp. 371-372). However, this option relies heavily on the existence of strong and lasting relationships between carer and care leaver. No such experience was evident in any of the participant stories within this research.

4.3.2   Receiving Support

Experiences of Inadequate Housing Support:

Receiving support to locate, acquire, and sustain independent accommodation emerged strongly as a theme of interest throughout the interviews. Participants repetitively voiced their discontent about and disappointment with the lack of assistance from adults in finding and maintaining suitable and appropriate housing. When asked to elaborate, they

voiced a desire for increased social worker assistance, and practical help to learn independent living-skills.

Participants were clear and insistent about what they described as discrimination from government agencies when assessing their housing needs. In many instances, they felt judgments had been made based on their age, and in some cases, their ethnicity. Each participant expressed moral sensitivities about feeling ignored, judged, or as one participant (Aroha) put it, "shoved aside" when reaching out for help from Work and Income (WINZ) and Oranga Tamariki. Aroha spoke of feeling abandoned by government agencies which, in her mind, had a responsibility to provide guaranteed, adequate shelter:

> I just didn't get the support that I felt like I deserved and that I felt like I needed. I just got shoved aside. I know a lot of young kids who have been through the same shit stuff, sorry.

Aroha's thoughts were not isolated among the wider group, with most participants voicing similar grievances and sentiments of abandonment by the state. Her experience was echoed by Nora, a Samoan mother, who described WINZ and Oranga Tamariki by stating:

> They are not welcoming. They looked down on us cause we are young and they don't think we are capable of looking after ourselves or being responsible. They think we are going to like, just abuse the houses that if they did give us the chance to live in a house, they don't think we would be able to handle, yeah.

Participants point to their age being the main reason they were treated so poorly, regardless of their gender or ethnicity. But concerns around racism were also voiced firmly amongst the group. Māori and Pasifika young people expressed disgust as they described experiences of racist treatment from government workers. For a couple of participants, their feelings of rejection and distrust towards government agencies were strong enough to deter them from seeking further help for housing. The mothers shared personal disappointments regarding negative experiences with government workers, which they described as discriminatory and judgemental. Nora elaborated on her experience by noting: "Yeah, the case manager who was dealing with us, she was ok sometimes. Sometimes she was a bit rude. Umm, just cause how I look young. Young and pregnant, yeah."

It is difficult to validate the degree of discrimination each participant encountered because the responses were unique to each individual's story and the research did not investigate government responses to care leaver housing requests specifically. Still, in several interviews, participants became visibly upset as they retold stories of previous dealings with those responsible for providing accommodation assistance.

A recent study in Ireland by Glynn and Mayock (2021) argues that dependence on the state after care can leave many young people in precarious circumstances due to inadequate support. This is especially true when people are faced with stretched housing market conditions, an experience which New Zealanders are familiar with. Glynn and Mayock (2021) report care leavers expressing concerns about the level of disrespect and lack of care by government authorities similar to those interviewed for this project. Glynn and Mayock cite systems failure and housing market failures as the main culprits. One could conclude that New Zealand is currently facing similar fall out for its care leavers due to systems failure and housing market failures.

As a result of past negative experiences, questions about how government agencies/representatives could help improve housing outcomes were met with cynicism, mistrust, and fear. While participants were staunch about avoiding government assistance in the future, they were also quick to place blame on their own shoulders for past placement failures. Some participants were dismissive of their state of penury in relationship to accommodation. Instead, they frequently placed the burden for finding stable housing on themselves, and used throw-away comments to condemn their past failed efforts to secure accommodation.

Rāwiri talked about his past opportunities for housing and failure to sustain his tenancies by noting:

> It worked out for a little bit until now, when I fucked it over about a month ago. Got into a bit of shit with the neighbours. Hmm. Yeah… I guess it's just the situations I put myself into ah. Can't really blame anyone but myself.

Desired Supports to Accompany Housing:

When asked what housing support should look like, participants emphasised the need for more youth-specific housing, and sustained government support until individuals could manage on their own. However, most participants doubted whether any progress was possible given their history of negative interactions with multiple government departments.

Jess, a wāhine Māori aged 19, offered the following line of reasoning for increased government support: "What's the point in helping for so many years if you are just going to cut it at 18, kinda thing. And the young person is not even right, [or] stable…." Participants requested specific support from adults who had their own lived experience of care that would enable them to empathise from a position of greater understanding.

Crystal, a 20-year-old wāhine Māori, described the peer support she needed:

Umm, put people who work in those areas, that have experience… like they know what it's like to live through the system. They know what it's like to move from home to home, cause like every social worker I have had doesn't know what it's like. But they have the right to judge us and they have the right to make decisions for us, that ain't good. Yeah.

Crystal's request for a workforce that includes those with lived experience is not unprecedented in health and social services. Employing individuals with lived experience is common in mental health and some adult social housing programmes, especially where clients experience a variety of complex needs and present with significant trauma histories (Shalaby & Agyapong, 2020). The roles available to those with lived experience are usually part of what is known as a 'peer support team' comprising workers who can empathise with the trauma history of clients. Such workers can offer support, advice, encouragement and community connection from a perspective informed by their own trauma history.

Cultural Support

Participants were proactive in voicing the importance and prominence of their culture and the needs associated with it.

There was a profound yearning amongst the Māori participants for their cultural identity to be the leading factor for deciding where they were housed and how they were supported towards adulthood. For them, housing solutions that reconnected them to their whakapapa and tribal home held the strongest appeal with an emphasis on re-establishing relationship with their extended iwi/hapū roots. All seven Māori participants indicated that housing closer to their home marae or on their tribal lands would be desirable in their personal contexts. None of the participants had a genealogical link to urban based marae across Auckland. Instead, their whakapapa led them to connections with rural marae outside the city limits of Auckland.

In contrast to these requests for cultural support, rangatahi Māori spoke of several instances from past experiences where their cultural identity was disregarded by both Oranga Tamariki and WINZ. Atawhai described her experience:

> I got no recognition as a Māori female, as a Māori teenager. I was not recognised as a Māori teenager. I was recognised as a troubled kid. As a troubled kid from the streets. That's how I was recognised. That's how I feel I was looked at.

A photo from Atawhai representing her need for more cultural support.

Atawhai's experience was not isolated among Māori participants. Each individual rangatahi expressed loathing for authorities who failed to live up to their own stated cultural aims, as outlined in the 7AA legislation of the Oranga Tamariki Act (1989). Most participants were aware of the addition of the 7AA clause in the legislation, although they could not explain it in detail. While the 7AA legislation was put in place to avoid cultural negligence towards those in and leaving care, no participant in the project could identify any actions that come close to matching the goals of those standards. Section 7AA includes the protection of

Māori rights and interests, upholding the mana (dignity, respect) of Māori in the care system, increasing equity for Māori in care, and listening to the voices of Māori (Oranga Tamariki, 2020). Yet tragically, all seven Māori participants viewed these goals as farcical and absurd compared to their own experience as rangatahi Māori within the Oranga Tamariki system. Participants were bemused by the lofty aims put forward in 7AA and felt the behaviour of Oranga Tamariki on the ground contradicted its own commitments at a policy level.

Crystal expressed a desire to connect with her Māori roots on multiple occasions and reported receiving no support to help her do so. In the same way, as a young wāhine Māori, Aroha frequently raised a longing to connect back with her home marae but said she received no assistance from Oranga Tamariki. She also wanted support to officially change her Pākehā name to her Māori name but reported receiving no guidance on how to do it.

Similarly, Jess cannot recall a single moment in her care journey when her Māori identity was discussed. She felt acknowledgement of her Māori heritage was totally neglected. Leoni too felt her cultural needs were totally ignored. She reported a lack of interest from authority figures within Oranga Tamariki to assist her to explore the importance of her whakapapa to Ngāti Porou. Instead, Leoni was left on her own to engage in this exploration.

As evidenced in all the participants' responses above, cultural support was largely absent within their transition experiences overall. While some Māori participants did not specifically emphasise their cultural needs within the context of their post-care housing experience, their personal commentary on circumstances where they experienced discrimination at the hands of government agencies often eluded to the mishandling and misunderstanding of their cultural needs. The importance of cultural considerations in a care leavers' housing journey are covered in further detail in Chapter Five.

Social Work Support

One third of participants wanted to see increased support, in the form of more social worker assistance, for navigating government systems and sourcing suitable accommodation without relying on emergency housing and motels. Although most of the participants were already assigned a social worker, few reported having regular and consistent social work

support for the areas of need that mattered to them most. Participants acknowledged their lack of understanding of government systems and admitted a need for positive and supportive adults to walk alongside them as they navigated independent living for the first time. Participants linked their choice of housing with more intensive personal social worker assistance over the long-term.

The desire from participants for more assistance to navigate independent housing in a post-care environment is supported by Lemon et al. (2005) described the importance of hands-on support from key workers in independent living programmes operating in the United States. Mendes and Purtell (2017) argued for increased, intensive support for care leavers during their transition out of care. Their work identified diminishing supports for care leavers as a precursor to other vulnerabilities including homelessness. Mendes and Purtell's views were mirrored by participants in this research who emphasised the importance of social work support as an absolute necessity.

Lance, a 19-year-old tāne Māori who had a positive experience with his social worker, described the support he needs:

> I feel like my view should be on my circumstance. I am a single male. I don't know nothing about living independently, so automatically, boom. Everything that I just said. There should be help systems, people who help me. People like Sarah [key worker – not her real name]. People who help me cope with living. Just cause of my circumstances. Yeah.

Other participants echoed Lance's concerns, in the process voicing a high degree of distrust in the current support available to them, particularly the role of government social workers. Jenny, a young Pākehā female, described her relationship with Oranga Tamariki with respect to housing support: "OT never get in touch. I only call when I need support or something. Or need help. They are not really in my life unless I call them."

Participants vocalised the urgent need for more proactive, prolonged, and enduring support as they exited the care system. They believe that support to exit well should last until care leavers can manage on their own, which they broadly described as the point at which they possess the skills to navigate life's challenges with maturity and independence.

Atawhai described her positive experience of receiving support through Ma Te Huru Huru Trust in South Auckland as an example of what such support could look like:

> I feel at home here. Like I go through things daily, but when I come to course [at Ma Te Huru Huru]… I feel I got no things to worry about. I feel like I can just be me. Do me without like thinking about like oh, actually, someone is watching me. I can be me, I can be myself. I can act me. I feel more at home here more than I do anywhere else other than with my family and my son.

Atawhai's visual expression of what support for housing and independent living should look like.

4.3.3   Seeking a Permanent Dwelling

A History of Short-term, Unstable Housing Placements

Participants repeatedly stated a desire for permanent and long-term youth housing options. Their interest in gaining permanent accommodation was prioritised as a theme above the type, location, and standard of housing. When responding to questions that specifically asked about the style, type, and size of housing, participants would continually return to a yearning for something permanent. While each participant had a unique perspective behind their desires for permanent housing, they shared a history of short-term, temporary, and unstable housing placements which appeared to inform their views of future need.

Participants used the word 'home' to describe accommodation placements where they would never be asked to leave. Home was a place where you could put down your roots, without fear of being deracinated. Considering most participants had spent their post-care lives housed in motels, emergency accommodation, boarding houses, and unsafe family situations—and experiencing episodic homelessness—their desire for something more permanent is hardly surprising.

Nora, a Samoan female participant, was sent back to her mother's house after leaving care and encountered significant resistance to her presence, leading to episodic homelessness in Auckland city before several stints in motels with her baby and partner. She described her post-care experience of seeking housing assistance with WINZ as problematic, scary, and unwelcoming. The motels where she was placed were unsafe and made her feel insecure and afraid. Nora depicted her neighbours in emergency accommodation as "dodgy adults who should never be allowed near young people and children." Nora told her story of temporary housing and transience:

> Yeah, because I was pregnant with my son and the motel was so crappy. It was really crappy and unhygienic, and the people who were living next to me in the motel, they were like umm, really bad, like smoking pot, and doing drugs and you could smell it inside our room. And it was really dirty. We had to supply our own things. We did receive a benefit, but it wasn't enough for us to stay at that motel and provide food, like proper meals, because they only had like a microwave, and… I moved back into my partners mum's house. We stayed there for a while and something happened between him and his family, so we had to move out again, into another motel. Another emergency housing. We have been through quite a few emergency housing [situations].

Leoni, a 20-year-old wāhine Māori mum, had a similar experience to Nora. She moved from motel to motel until she and her tamariki ended up in cabin accommodation at a local caravan park. Leoni had lived in at least five motels since leaving care. She advocated strongly for long-term and permanent housing with better accommodation options for mums like herself. Leoni's current housing situation made her feel unsafe, especially considering the many older tenants housed in cabins right next to her. She voiced fears around taking her children for a daily walk because of the alcohol and drug consumption present in the camping ground. She was also concerned that these behaviours continued to go unpoliced by the owners.

Leoni expressed the importance of every care leaver being guaranteed a roof over their head when they leave care and was critical of the fact that this outcome is not currently actualised. She shared stories describing the number of her peers who were left to fend for themselves and find housing alone, these recollections mirrored her own experience.

Rāwiri, one of the tāne Māori participants, echoed the experiences of his female counterparts. He too had his own unique experience of short-term and temporary housing during his transition out of care. Rāwiri's housing situation at the time of the interview was a motel but was changing week-to-week. To be stable and supported properly, he wanted more than just a place to sleep and a worker to help him. Rāwiri needed permanence, continuity, and constancy. He sought ontological security which can be gained only through a long-term housing placement. However, for Rāwiri, receiving housing assistance from WINZ and Oranga Tamariki had not resulted in anything remotely close to long-term living options. In the past month, Rāwiri had lived in six motels and did not know where he would be living in a week's time. When asked about his choice of housing, he spoke instead about his experiences of housing instability:

> I just don't know where I am going to end up in the next week or you know…like I don't know where I will be…like it's not stable. Week after week I am getting changed from motel to motel. It's just got to the point where I have moved 'round so much that I don't give a fuck. Like, I am just going to end up dead. All good. It is what it is. Yeah I do get those worries, like, I might be homeless tonight, or where the fuck am I going to be tomorrow night, but yeah.

Rāwiri's response reveals the detrimental effect of housing instability on his life and wellbeing. Like Rāwiri, other participants connected their experiences of housing instability with both a shrinking confidence and growing negativity with regard to their future.

Jess, a 19-year-old wāhine Māori, described her temporal and transient experience of housing since leaving care referencing "…multiple places. I have been in and out of emergency housing, I have been on and off the streets. Moving around a lot, yeah."

Jess left care at the age of 18. She describes her transition as going straight from care into homelessness. As a homeless person, she found herself in a daily struggle to find adequate food and shelter before connecting with WINZ and going through a whole host of emergency housing placements. During her interview, Jess spoke of feeling cut off from Oranga Tamariki and unsupported once she was discharged. Since leaving care less than one year before the time of her interview (at which time she was accommodated in emergency housing), she has lived in multiple locations, on and off the streets, with no permanent dwelling. Jess shared that, as a care leaver, she had lived in more than 20 places in the last year.

Table 3 (below) plots all participants' post-care housing experiences, including any period of homelessness since exiting care. Across the sample of participants, five different accommodation experiences emerged. They include homelessness, motel and emergency housing, family placements, Non-Government Organisation (NGO) placements, and boarding houses. The movement through two or more accommodation settings was common for 70% of the total sample. Six out of seven participants had experienced multiple movements between different accommodation settings within twelve months of leaving care. Fifty percent of all participants had experienced episodic homelessness within a year of exiting care, mirroring international trends (Mackenzie et al., 2020). An astonishing 60% of participants had experienced several stints in emergency accommodation, falling into emergency housing settings and/or homelessness immediately after exiting care. This outcome indicates possible systems failures within the government agencies responsible for supporting these young people into independent living.

Table 3

POST-CARE LIVING EXPERIENCES					
Participant	Homelessness	Motel Emergency Housing	Family Placement	NGO Provider	Boarding House
Atawhai	✔	✔	✗	✗	✔
Aroha	✔	✔	✔	✔	✗
Jenny	✗	✗	✗	✔	✗
Nora	✔	✔	✔	✗	✗
Leoni	✗	✔	✗	✗	✔
Bianca	✗	✗	✔	✗	✗
Rāwiri	✔	✔	✗	✔	✗
Crystal	✗	✗	✗	✔	✗
Lance	✗	✗	✔	✗	✗
Jess	✔	✔	✗	✗	✗
Percentage of Participants	50%	60%	40%	40%	20%

The Desired Experience of Housing

Throughout the interviews, the researcher found it difficult to turn participants' attention to aspirational ideas about housing in the future. It was as if the current and prior experience of housing instability had had a detrimental effect on participants' capacity to describe alternative solutions. However, when gently and repeatedly asked to comment on the importance of housing and what choices they desired, as noted above, permanent housing emerged as the top priority.

The young people craved ontological security for their futures, repeatedly eluding to the need to find a place of continuity and constancy in both their social and material environments (Johnson et al., 2010). Yet, a yearning for permanence sometimes emerged through subtle comments describing the absence of constancy and continuity in their lives, rather than the explicit call for more of it, as these terms were not ones which participants were familiar with. However, participants did describe permanent housing as a place to call home, and a step towards adulthood. For participants, an apartment or flat was something temporary, but a home was something permanent. They reported that finding a home was one of the most important goals they needed to achieve in order to transition into adulthood.

Some participants simply stated the significance of having a guaranteed roof over their heads to expel the worry and fear of not knowing where they would sleep or eat. Interestingly, participants were inadvertently referring to Maslow's hierarchy of needs which identifies physiological needs as the most critical in life. According to Maslow's hierarchy, physiological needs include food, water, shelter, and sleep; hence, housing is considered a fundamental human need (Aruma & Hanachor, 2017).

At times, participants appeared to be concerned solely with their physiological needs, unable to imagine their world free from precarity and insecurity. Leoni, one of the young mums, prioritised her physiological need for housing by stating: "I don't want to live on the streets. I want to like, ASAP find a house. Anything, like everyone wants a home to feel, to call something theirs to live in. To have warmth and a roof over their head. I don't know, to feel safe."

Leoni saw uncertain living circumstances as a precursor to homelessness. To her, short-term housing created significant barriers to gaining any meaningful personal progress. Participants talked about the difference between being offered emergency accommodation in contrast to receiving adequate support to find a long-term home. Emergency housing was just another place to crash and certainly not a place you could put your roots down.

For Lance, permanent housing was a sign of progress, and was understood as somewhere he could grow and mature while progressing on the journey towards becoming an adult. He noted:

> It's another chapter in your life. Another page being turned. Cause when you get a house it's like, step… and then there is the next step and the next step. Next step to becoming an adult, do you see what I am saying?

There was a general feeling amongst participants that without long-term or permanent housing options, the prospect of progress, personal growth, and adult living would remain forever beyond their reach. Gaining a permanent house was seen as a chance to take control over one's life. Aroha described its importance:

> I think it's really important because it shapes your then and now, but it also helps to shape your plans for the future. Like housing is really important for youth, it really is. I guess it's your first step into independence, and then after that you are capable of doing anything you can dream of. So you know. It's kinda like "Ok I've got a house now, so what am I going to do now, I'm gonna work, I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna do that," so it's just, it is your independence.

Aroha went on to describe permanent and long-term housing as foundational to living life well by adding:

> You can't get anything done without having a house… it's where you live. Its where you wake up in the morning. It's where you eat, it's where you sleep, yeah. It's your place. And it's very important for a person to have a place to take comfort and to call their own.

Nora took the photo below to visualise her desire for a permanent stand-alone house for her and her child. She described the importance of long-term housing as:

> Just my own space. Just everything that is in this photo. Like a safe environment. Cause all the emergency housing I have been in there is always like one family that is

not so good, and you can hear them arguing and it's not nice for my son to be around that, and yeah.

The Importance of Social Connection and Support

The longing that participants expressed for permanent accommodation is not only an indication of the absence of housing security in their lives, but also a signal of additional needs. Their descriptions of the benefits of having a permanent place to live included a chance to make good friends, join a neighbourhood, gain support and find belonging. As Aroha put it: [You need] "family, friends. People who are close to you. Love and a butt load of support." Jess echoed these sentiments on the importance of community and connection, adding: "Like, a lot of people coming together as a community kind of thing. Helping each-other out… in my own place, but in a community where everybody is connected kind of thing."
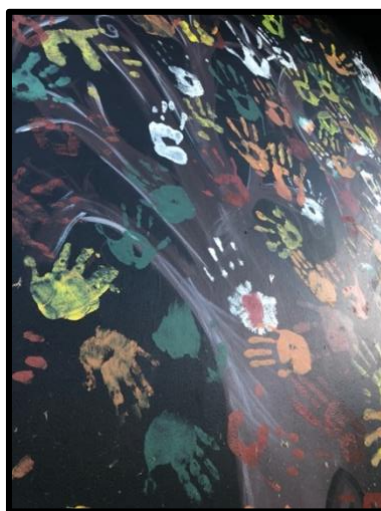
Jess's visual expression of the importance of community connection.

Speaking to the photo above, Jess elaborated on the importance of community by saying: "You can't get community if you are constantly moving and meeting new people every day. Sometimes it's good to meet new people but in the circumstances of moving round it's kinda not. [It's] not settling."

Aroha and Jess's reactions aligned with findings from Simon (2008), observations in the UK revealed similar views from a group of 80 care leavers. He remarked on the importance of care leavers establishing social networks, community connectedness, and social capital. When participants verbalised the need for friends, belonging and acceptance in a neighbourhood, they were drawing on the principles of social capital and community connectedness. They were consciously and unconsciously stating the value of ontological security for their future lives (which, as discussed in the previous chapter, involves both physical and social security).

4.3.4   Preferring Rural Locations, Near Nature

A central, and unexpected, theme that emerged from the data was a preferred location of accommodation in rural settings. Unlike other parts of the interviews, where young people initially struggled to imagine different housing options than their previous experience, they were able vividly and easily to envision the locations where they would like to live. It is striking that every participant viewed rural settings, away from city noise, as being attractive to them, especially because such settings are closer to nature.

Those who had been repeatedly housed in urban settings in Auckland talked about the motivation to get away from the trouble of the city. Moving to a more rural location was depicted as an opportunity to escape "the drama." Participants believed that, by entering neighbourhoods in remote settings, they would have calmer and more peaceful lives.

Interestingly, of the ten young people interviewed, none had experienced rural living in their care experience. It could be that the appeal of nature and rural settings is influenced by the lack of any experience living in more remote areas but, in the minds of the participants, it still represents the ideal place for them to live and thrive.

The photovoice activity featured multiple photos from each participant of open spaces, vegetation, and shaded paths. There was a strong view from some participants that being housed in temporary motels and emergency housing settings was not good for their wellbeing. In contrast, a chance to join a community close to nature was appealing and participants imagined it offering more space and a fresh start. Aroha described her desire for a rural placement and need to get away from the city:

> I am over the concrete jungle. It's everywhere around you. That's why I want to go up north too. To get away from it all. To live on the land. To have my own garden. Yeah, to live off the land really.

Rāwiri described his desire to move from a central Auckland city dwelling to somewhere more rural by saying: "I just need like a fresh start ah, fresh place in New Zealand. I just need to get out of Auckland to be honest. I just don't like the city bro. There's just too much drama."

While there seemed to be a strong urge to escape the city and difficulties in their present (urban) circumstances, participants expressed an equally genuine desire to be close to nature, trees, and the ocean. Leoni stated her desire to be near nature explicitly, noting: "If I was to live anywhere, I would like to live near the beach. Next to the water so I can take my kids for a swim."

Crystal reiterated the points made by Aroha, Rāwiri, and Leoni, describing her desire for calmer and more peaceful surroundings as a longing for: "Space, a nice space where you are away from the outside world where you can come to and it's safe. There's no worries and stuff like that." Crystal had previously mentioned her concerns about her current living circumstances where she was housed near difficult tenants. She felt moving to a rural location would offer more serenity and safety. Jess responded similarly and with longer-term aspirations in mind:

> I would probably take in the country for long term things, yep definitely. For a bit of privacy. It's just my experiences really. Maybe if I had more positive things to do in the city but it's like, there's a lot of bad things that come with it too, like people, connections, things you do, yeah. A lot of trouble, yeah.

The longing to be close to nature was reinforced visually during the photovoice activities. Green spaces and nature were the most photographed images of all the objects and

places presented in the work, and participants were not shy about sharing how nature played a positive role in their hoped-for housing experience. Nora described her photo below by saying, "I have always wanted a garden. It just feels like home, yeah."

Jess took multiple photos of trees, plants, and flowers. She described the importance of more rural settings and nature by saying,

I think it's just a sense of fresh air, freedom. Personally, that's what I think. You feel more calm out there, I do. I feel more calm. More relaxed. More connected to myself. Just take it all in, relax your mind.

As noted above, none of the participants for this project had experienced a rural housing placement in their care history. Instead, 100% of participants had experienced only

urban housing placements since leaving care. Because of this, the lived experience of rural housing, and its associated challenges and/or benefits, could not be analysed and compared with urban housing experiences. Even so, the theme and role of rural housing placements emerged strongly enough to warrant serious consideration as a youth-specific option for the future.

While reflecting on such information, the researcher was mindful that living in more rural settings would not necessarily result in participants' challenges disappearing. In fact, it could introduce new challenges that the participants had not considered (a topic covered in the Discussion Chapter). However, the point remains that participants in this research held a strong conviction that consideration of rural options needed to be present alongside urban ones.

4.3.5   Need for Tailored Options

Participants were insistent that no one size fits all when it comes to housing. Care leavers were clear they needed tailored housing supports fitting individual and circumstantial needs. However, it took time for this theme to emerge with participants initially struggling to offer any thoughts about alternative housing choices while exiting care. This was, in part, due to their preoccupation with ongoing unmet physiological needs. Yet, after the researcher laboured the point, participants were able to articulate the importance of tailored, youth-specific accommodation, separate from adult populations and responsive to a diverse range of needs.

As a result, participants began to specify housing choices. Their answers varied and included apartment living, tiny homes in rural settings, independent units in the city, and family homes for the mums with kids. Two participants described their choices in simple terms as "proper housing" and "warm housing."

The most mentioned housing types put forward amongst participants were standalone housing and apartments, as seen in Table 4 (below):

Table 4

Participant Pseudonym	Housing Choice #1	Housing Choice #2
Atawhai	Apartment	N/A
Aroha	Tiny home	N/A
Jenny	Cabins	Apartments
Nora	Stand-alone housing	N/A
Leoni	Warm housing	N/A
Bianca	Stand-alone housing	Tiny home
Rāwiri	Apartment	Individual units
Crystal	Independent units	N/A
Lance	Stand-alone housing	Apartment
Jess	Proper housing	N/A

While there was not one particular preferred option reflecting the collective voices of all the participants, there was agreement on the urgency of establishing a variety of options catering to different individual needs. It was critical to participants that decision-makers instituted a housing strategy with more sophistication than the current one-size-fits-all approach.

The collective call for a tailored approach to meet the diverse needs presenting in care leavers is supported by Fauth et al. (2012) work in the UK, which stressed the importance of implementing proactive, flexible, and varied responses to care leaver housing needs. It also reaffirms the immense value of including care leavers in decisions that implicate them and their housing futures in order to ensure that the strategies employed can adapt to individual and unique circumstances (as discussed later in this chapter).

Participants were vocal about their longing for housing options beyond family placements alone. This is because, for a number of the participants, family placements had been the only post-care living option presented to them at their point of exit. This opinion may be somewhat controversial considering the current national narrative in New Zealand strongly supporting a strategy of returning those in care, in particular Māori, to their family of origin as they exit. In the case of the young people interviewed in this project, however, the option of family placements after care was met with considerable tension and uncertainty. In

fact, participants named family placements after care as one of their main sources of post-care accommodation difficulties, and a preliminary step towards housing instability.

Reasons behind a reluctance to return to family included relational difficulties, fear of abuse, fear around personal safety, and a desire to leave past hurts behind them. Participants were also keen to make the point that they did not want to be overly burdensome to others, including their families, especially after years of separation. However, while participants expressed a desire for housing separate to their biological families as they exited care, they were also quick to convey a desire to remain in relationship with their families beyond care. The desire for housing alternatives to family living placements, appeared to be influenced more by past experiences of relational difficulty and physical safety which participants and their families had not been given the opportunity to resolve. Further investigation of post-care family housing placements and their suitability for care leavers are covered in the Discussion chapter.

Youth Voice on Housing

The participants' views on housing options were diverse and illuminating, with each individual contributing unique perspectives on the role of housing in their journey out of care, and on which housing types, locations, and choices should be available to them. Atawhai described accommodation that would meet her needs by stating, "Something as simple as an apartment, a flat. Something with a roof, huh. Something decent, yeah. Decent but homely."

Aroha spoke more widely to her needs, and also considered the needs of her peers:

> I think there should be other options, like but I think it all depends on the youth and what their situation is too. …. A person who is independent and wants to go off on their own then there should be options for them to pursue that. If there is a person who is leaving care and wants to go back and spend time with their family and whānau there should be options to pursue that. I think that they should just come up with a list of ideas and list of things and say "ok these are the options we have for you as a young person leaving care. These are the housing options we have for you."

Nora stressed the importance of speaking with care leavers and asking them what tailored support would look like:

> Umm, probably like talk to us. I wish there were options for the young, for the youth. Like I wish there were youth houses that the social workers from OT could sit us down and tell us that there is this option and it's safe. And you don't have to be afraid, and you can stay there and it's safe, and people are on board to support.

Participants were not naive about the difficulties of securing housing in the current market, and appreciated the complexities involved with offering more adaptive and tailored responses. There were replies from participants who acknowledged the expense of housing and the practical difficulties that arose from the provision of a range of housing options. Jenny commented: "Well, I know housing is quite expensive, but I know they could probably put them into like little apartments or cabins, or something like that. So they have somewhere to go after they leave OT care, so they don't have to worry."

Jenny's sentiment was echoed by Rāwiri who said: "As long as it's a place to stay I am not fussed. I'm not asking for a 20-bedroom house. Fuck! Just anything that can fit a family. All good."

The prevailing argument put forward in different ways by multiple participants centred on a simple guarantee that housing would be safe, warm, and separate from others. Lance described his simplicity of need: "Yeah, so the only choice we should get is that we are going to have that, 100%. That we are going to have a place to stay. We don't have to be able to pick it." When asked to expand on his point of not needing the opportunity to pick a specific house, Lance spoke about the danger of having unrealistic expectations.

> I am a realistic type of person. You see what I am saying? You gotta be more realistic. I can't just go up to a person and ask them for a house. That's not realistic. See what I am saying. But I can go up and ask them to help me find a place to live.

To Lance, what was most important was that someone helped him find a place to live; he stressed that the type of housing was less important than the simple guarantee to be housed. Whether it was a standalone house or apartment did not concern him as much as the knowledge that he would get housed somewhere and have the support to live independently. Lance's reluctance to emphasise the importance of choice for himself was distinctly different from the rest of the participants.

When allowed the time to think and ponder on their responses, each participant was able to articulate and describe in detail the type of housing solution that would be suitable for them. Aroha's choice of housing was specific and well-articulated:

> I regret not having the choice of what I wanted. And really I would have wanted a tiny home. Here's one of my photos of a tiny home, and here's another one. It's got a little bed and a little kitchen. And a bedroom.
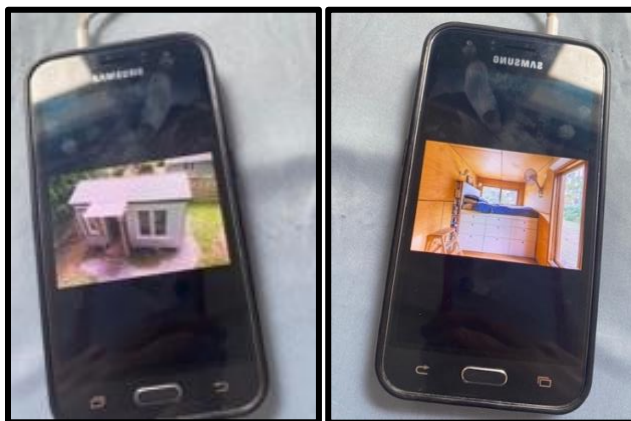
Participants also showed a remarkable empathy for peers who may need an alternative solution to their own, as evidenced by Lance's reply:

> Depending on the situation, see what I am saying? Uh, apartments would probably be the most generic answer…but say if they are older and they've got relationships and kids, you know what I am saying, and other family members that are attached with them, then you gotta get them houses. It depends on the situation.

Feedback from participants indicated that the provision of tailored options extended beyond housing choice alone. A deeper discussion about exercising personal agency emerged alongside participant choices of accommodation type. For youth, having a say about where they lived was as important as having a house to live in. The call from participants for more say on their post-care living experiences is consistent with findings from international studies that stress the importance of care leavers participating in decisions affecting their future.

Research by Stein and Morris (2010) drew evidence from several studies in different jurisdictions and made definitive links between the involvement of care leavers in their housing decisions and how stable and lasting those placements were likely to be. When care leavers were consulted, listened to, and offered the chance to influence where they might live

after care, more permanent placements were achieved, with better life outcomes. While both the type and supply of housing are limited in New Zealand, the opportunity to involve care leavers in decisions about where they live after care remains critical for any lasting positive outcomes to be achieved.

Below is a word cloud with the types of housing participants repeatedly referenced during the interviews to describe their choice of accommodation.

While there is diversity in the type of housing cited, a clear emphasis on more youth-specific options, and choices that offered independence from others, emerged.

4.3.6   Training and Preparation for Post-Care Living

The need for training for independent living emerged strongly among participants whose experiences of rushed post-care housing placements had left them ill-equipped and unprepared for the challenges of adult living. According to participants, the ability to choose and maintain permanent accommodation relied heavily on training and preparation prior to exiting care. They longed for opportunities to learn how to live independently before any post-care housing options were actioned. This expressed need emerged alongside frustrations that no such training had been offered in the past. Participants talked about lacking skills to

do basic household tasks. Some did not know how to cook or clean, while others had never paid a bill or been taught about holding a tenancy.

Participants aspired to be financially independent, but lacked the capability to improve their financial planning skills on their own. They viewed their own inability to manage their finances, rent, transport, and food as major barriers to progress. Participants were not shy to admit their shortcomings, but did associate feelings of shame and inadequacy with their lack of knowledge about how to perform basic tasks.

A recent study by Glynn and Mayock (2021) aptly described appropriate living placements for care leavers as secure or liminal spaces, vital to practicing independence. They argue that care leavers need room to grow and learn adult skills, before and during their transition out of care, without experiencing dire consequences when mistakes are made. These views echo Yates's (2001) New Zealand research titled "Sink or Swim: Leaving Care in New Zealand", which identified that care leavers' journeys beyond care were under-resourced and neglected. Yates remarked that care leavers were peremptorily expected to navigate the adult world almost immediately after leaving care. Despite efforts over the past 20 years to remedy these concerns by providing more social work support within Oranga Tamariki, little seems to have changed for the care leavers themselves.

Participants felt that learning to behave like a functional adult in an independent setting was still left to chance with minimal assistance from designated social workers. None of the participants in this project had attended any formal or informal training on the basics of holding a tenancy, and few knew any of the implications of, or responsibilities surrounding, the signing of a tenancy agreement. It was as if authorities had given no consideration to the core skills these care leavers would need to acquire and maintain accommodation as young adults. At the same time, most participants accepted that the situation was a case of unintended consequences from adults who were too distant to hear or acknowledge their criticisms.

Aroha described the importance of being prepared for independent living:

I mean like that support, like getting cutlery, cups and plates, linen, someone to drive you to get the things you need. Us as youth, we also need to take our step to

independence. But someone showing you how to cook. Practical things. Cause we don't think about that growing up.

Jenny echoed Aroha's perspective, speaking about the absence of preparation for independent living in her own experience: "It was a lot harder, cause I didn't know most of the basic things, like how to cook food and stuff cause I wasn't allowed to do it when I was in OT homes. I don't know why. Just wasn't."

Nora's views were similar. She expressed anger at the lack of training for independence before leaving care. She longed to understand more about navigating housing options for herself, and how to get the support to do so. Nora expressed her concerns as follows:

> I wish they prepared us for this. They always babied us in care. They did things for us. They never taught us this is how it's going to be, and this is how…cause I didn't know. I grew up in OT my whole life and like yeah, I have never experienced this before. I just wish they taught us how it was going to be.

Participants wanted to see more training for care leavers in the future. They held that any additional training offered needed to include practical living skills that allowed young people to learn how to manage the basic responsibilities associated with living independently. Leoni expressed her view on the need for training:

> They didn't prepare me at all. I just sort of clicked and did it on my own. I never had that support from my care givers. It was just all about getting programmes done, cause like I became a young parent at a young age and so they wanted me to go to parenting courses so I could keep my child. They never asked me like, what's your plan when you get out of care, like where are you going to live. I did all the independent stuff on my own.

Lance, one of the tāne Māori participants, saw his lack of training on how to manage a dwelling independently as a significant barrier to finding adequate housing. Believing that independent housing was part of a rite of passage into adulthood, he expressed his frustration at his inability to manage a move into housing on his own:

> Yeah, now that's the thing. …. That's the thing I was talking about. That's going to shock me. See what I am saying. Cause us people, when we are 20 we think that is easy. We just think we are going to bounce around… get houses… Oh no, you gotta

pay this shit, this shit, this shit…That is the shit, that's gonna make it hard. That's the shit. Cleaning, fucking bills on top of bills, food, water bills, rent, all that. All that.

Crystal felt the lack of preparation for independent living had significant, perhaps even severe, consequences for care leavers which went beyond the inability to acquire stable, adult accommodation. She expressed her concerns by saying: "Most of the people I know who have come out of care are like, doing nothing with their life. They are all like, stuck on drugs and alcohol, stuff like that. Because they haven't been taught anything, they are just like… finding an escape."

In summary, there was a clear call for the prioritisation of training that teaches care leavers how to live independently. For participants, possessing the skills to manage a house had to be addressed alongside any new housing initiatives or placement opportunities beyond care. The needs were interlinked and could not be viewed in isolation. In expressing these views, participants made it clear they were interested in more than housing. They also wanted to know how to maintain and clean a house.

In effect, participants wanted training on how to live as an adult. This longing filtered through every response they gave on housing choices throughout the interviews.

4.3.7 Independent Housing Options Separate from Others

The desire to live independently from peers was strongly voiced by multiple participants. They spoke of the frustrations related to being placed in crowded environments where they could not find space to forge a new independent life journey. Most were currently housed in congregate settings which they described as having detrimental effects on their steps to maturity and adult life.

Specifically, participants named negative peer interactions in living circumstances as major inhibitors to personal progress. Their concerns about peer housing models were consistent with findings reported in Gifford-Smith et al. (2005) (covered in the literature review) which cautioned that peer-flatting models can increase the likelihood of negative behaviour and relational breakdowns. Congregate housing settings can produce and stimulate

challenges that impede progress in independent living and exacerbate vulnerabilities already present in care leavers' lives.

Participants associated independent flatting—living separately from others—as a chance to finally be themselves and get the fresh start they had been seeking for years, free from the concerns and challenges facing their peers. Aroha explained why an independent living setting was so important to her:

> Because it gives you independence. You know, kids in care, they have grown up their whole lives around other people. They've had to do everything by a certain set of rules. They have had to live up to their standards. And you know, being in care you have to do everything your care givers tell you. You have to have a curfew, you are not allowed to do this. It's like being a teenager in your parent's house but it's different at the same time. Cause you need a lot of opportunity to learn your independence, learn how the world works, and that's why I think it's important for someone to have their own place.

Crystal raised similar points to Aroha when describing the importance of being housed independently from others. She gave an account of several of her attempts to end old habits being undermined by peers whose goals (or the absence of any) directly contrasted with her own. She felt that without the chance to get free from troublesome flatting relationships, it would be very difficult for her to move on positively with her life, something she desired dearly. She described the importance of offering independent youth housing placements, comparing it to her current congregate housing placement:

> I would make sure I wouldn't put them all in the same place… because it isn't healthy. Even though [this placement] is one of the best [I have had]… it's difficult when you are trying to become a new person, [and] all of your friends who do bad shit [are] right there in front of you doing it. You know, there's no way to escape. Even if I go to work, when I come back I smell drugs as I walk through the hallway. I am like, oh fuck, shall I go for a cone? Shall I go have a can with them? It's a constant battle trying to remove yourself from that toxic environment.

Crystal then went on to re-emphasise her personal need to be housed alone:

> Yeah for me living here I have to be alone, like if I am going to become successful. Like I am surrounded by people that don't want to succeed. They want to stay in the position they are now. And like do nothing. I'm like fighting… to get out of the bad habits I used to be in. Stuff like that.

Peer-to-peer influence featured as a major consideration for each participant as they pondered what future housing could look like for them. Each participant uniquely and independently voiced concerns about who they would be housed with, and why. They felt if they were given the chance to be housed alone and with the right adult support, then more personal development and progress could begin.

Nora described her desire for an independent living circumstance by stating: "I really would love a home for me and my son. It's where we can be comfortable and just be us, no one else around. Where we can be happy and have a space to ourselves…yeah." Leoni talked about being an introvert and needing space instead of being in crowded emergency housing. She stated her need for an option that accommodated her and her children independently: "…it would be better if I had my own, just like my own house at my own property. Yeah, cause there's a lot of people in the community village and I don't like to be like around heaps of people."

Lance, however, although positive about an independent living option, was more circumspect and realistic about his readiness for such a move:

> Umm, I ain't let it be known though, you see what I am saying. Like, cause I want my own crib, but I feel like, not now… I am not sure I would be able to handle that. The responsibility of having a house. So I didn't let it be known. It's nobody's fault, cause I didn't say nothing about it. I didn't say how I feel. I want one of course, but I don't think it's the right time for it, you see what I'm saying?

Lance's apprehension around independent living was connected to views he expressed in relation to the previous theme of feeling unprepared and untrained to manage an apartment on one's own. However, when it came to voicing the kind of housing he wanted through the photovoice activity, he reinforced his desire for independent living in ways that were similar to his peers, stating: "So I just wanna be on my own so I can do my own shit. Walk around. Just eat whatever I want, see what I am saying." His image of an urban apartment block met his expectations for the kind of living circumstance that he hoped to obtain.

Lance's photo of an apartment block he would like to live in.

Jess also voiced the importance of independent living in her photovoice activity using pictures of large open windows to symbolise the freedom that would come from being housed separately and alone. She described what it would be like for her to live on her own and be free to make her own choices, saying, "The freedom to come in and out as you please, like, even to go outside and have fresh air. You know, without being constantly followed or watched or like, being told something you know… yeah".

Jess's visual interpretation of an
independent living circumstance on her own.

While participants sought independent living options separate from their peers, none had experienced living situations in the past where they were alone. Therefore, a genuine comparison between the benefits and challenges of living in congregate versus independent settings could not be undertaken. However, the desire and longing to be equipped and supported to live independent lives was evident throughout the interviews. When pressing

participants on what independence may look like, every reply prioritised being housed alone and separate from their peers.

The desire to live separate from other vulnerable care leavers is not new or unique to this group of care leavers. It is supported by an international housing placement model known as scattered-site housing which offers independent living placements dispersed in safe and stable neighbourhoods with a diverse range of residents, not sole social housing areas. Scattered-site housing directly aims to house vulnerable individuals or families into environments where they can connect and build networks with others from different backgrounds to themselves. Such environments both encourage vulnerable tenants to build networks in social settings unlike their own and offer them a fresh start in life.

Research on scattered-site models internationally by Barnes (2012) evidenced positive outcomes for vulnerable adults. Barnes also cited increased difficulties for housing clients when they were placed in more congested settings with others who exhibited similar vulnerabilities to their own.

4.3.8   Prioritising Youth in Social Housing Policy

Participants wanted care leaver housing to be prioritised, and an acknowledgement of their housing needs from decision-makers which would result in immediate action. Throughout the interviews, participants verbalised feelings of having their housing needs overlooked and disregarded. There was consistent feedback indicating that each young person felt that government agencies treated them as a low priority group for housing.

However, participants viewed themselves as the opposite. They each made personal pleas for decision-makers to carefully weigh their housing needs, while stressing the urgency of immediate action to ensure their housing future. They described the action needed as an introduction of more youth-specific housing support set aside especially for care leavers.

As a rationale for their arguments, participants pointed to circumstances where they were uplifted from dangerous environments when entering care, only to be returned to them a decade or so later with little change in the environment, except their age. This trajectory ultimately led to care leavers fleeing from dangerous living circumstances with no housing alternatives or safety nets in place.

This led half the group into episodic stints of homelessness. Participants believed they deserved better, especially since they were still the responsibility of the state. Many placed an obligation on the state to support them until they reached independence, up to the age of 25.

The view of housing as a human right emerged alongside a call for youth housing to be prioritised at least to the same degree as adult-focused social housing; as articulated by Aroha:

> We need just as much support with housing as anyone else does. But at the end of the day having a roof over everyone's head is really important. It's a human right so… you know, there's so many homeless people in this country and all over the globe and people just look at them and assume that they are there because of what they've done, but really our governments and stuff could be out there helping people. It's not treated as if it's a right, not a lot of the time I don't think.

The emphasis participants placed on being prioritised for housing supports the views of child welfare experts internationally who have, for decades, been calling for greater emphasis to be placed on housing solutions for care leavers (Tweedle, 2005). Simon (2008) stressed the importance of prioritising housing as a fundamental need for UK care leavers, arguing that its importance outstrips educational and training needs. Participants in this research supported Simon's views in their interview responses. Nora was more specific about the reasons why care leavers should be a prioritised group for housing. She articulated her need and the need of her peers:

> It's really important because like umm, when you leave care, yeah just it's really important. It is a need for us. Because we have been in OT and like, most kids who have been in OT don't know about this stuff and it's really hard to get a house. Especially kids who are in OT and on bad terms with their family, like, where are they meant to go after, after they leave OT. There are options but the options are not really good, not safe for them. Yeah, really hard.

Overall, participants expressed significant distrust in government agencies, whose duty of care had often been found to be lacking in their lives. The participants did not want special treatment, just fair treatment given in a timely manner. It is of significant concern that in several interviews participants seemed resigned to the fact that nothing would change for them in the short-term and that they had no confidence in any state assistance for housing. Yet, its priority cannot be overlooked when considering the risks of homelessness and

unstable housing for care leavers outlined throughout this project, and within wider international literature.

4.4   Mapping the Findings

The eight themes that emerged from the data were distinct and could be investigated independently. Yet, at the same time, their connection to each other and the ways they interact helps map the housing journey of care leavers, as depicted below. These maps are limited in that they plot the journey in a linear and simplified way. In reality, the journey for each young person is unique and filled with complexities particular to their specific circumstances. Still, the visual depiction of the themes alongside one another helps to convey an overall trajectory that fairly represents the journey of the sample as a whole, and the connections between themes that are evident in the findings.

The first task was to plot the actual housing journey of participants next to their desired housing journey (Figure 1). Figure 1 plots the described housing experience of participants against their desired experience contrasting the participants' experiences of post-care housing with their broader views on what an improved system of support would mean for their journey.

Figure 1
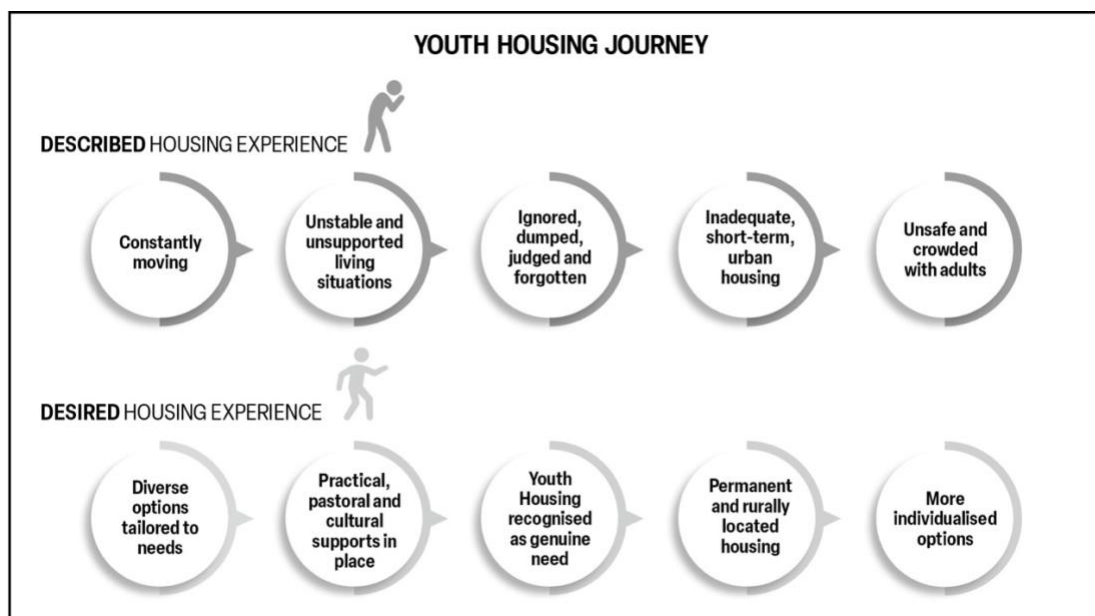
Participants described their prior experiences of housing as unstable and raised concerns about the absence of training required to transition smoothly into independent living. Their housing experiences in the past were limited to temporary accommodation placements, with no chance for establishing long-term connections to community. These circumstances included congregate environments where participants experienced relational conflict with either flatmates or family members. Participants' housing experiences were often urban, crowded, and overcrowded, with either short-term supports only or no support at all. Every participant shared at least one story describing their lack of choice of housing and a general absence of consultation on the shared living arrangements they were told they would transition into.

Figure 2 (below) reiterates the comprehensive support sought by the participants and demonstrates the role of adequate housing options for care leavers, as well as the effects of housing instability without these options present. Before a young person was offered housing, they needed to learn how to manage the responsibilities that go with it. By being placed suddenly into unsuitable housing environments, often in crowded locations and with diminishing supports, young people's experience of housing left them feeling "left out in the cold" and shut out from contributing to their chosen path in relation to their housing future. Consequently, such experiences led participants into circumstances where they developed self-blaming attitudes for being unprepared for independent life.

Figure 2
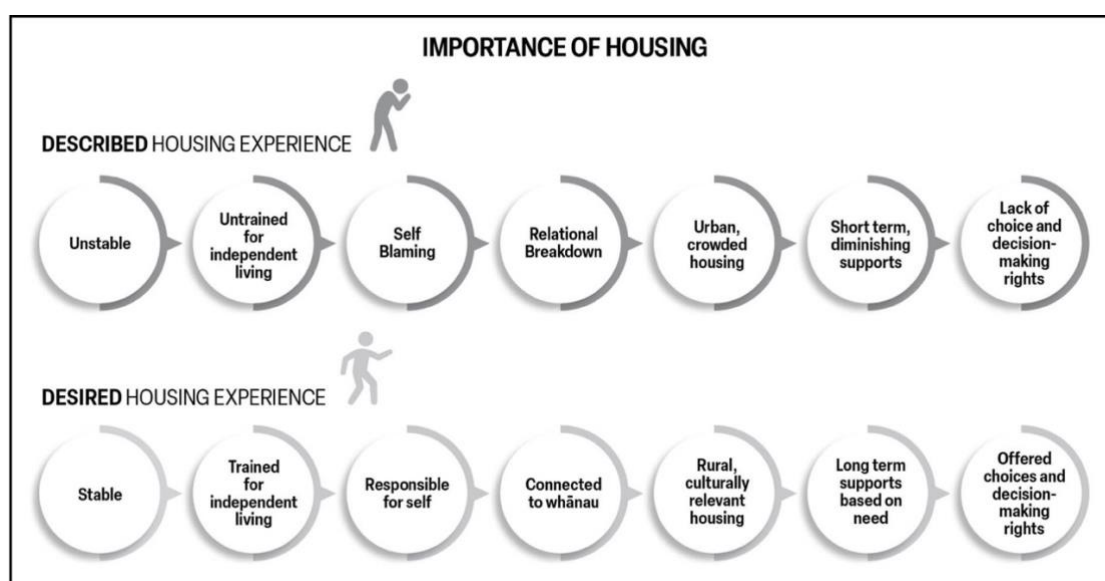
In contrast to their described experience, participants desired stable housing, accompanied by practical training to live independently. They believed that by receiving practical support and guaranteed housing, they would gain the skills required for the new responsibilities associated with independent housing and adulthood. Participants emphasised the importance of rural housing that is close to nature and culturally appropriate, tailored to the individual needs of each care leaver. They stressed the value of being offered long-term options and afforded stronger decision-making rights around their living choices and housing future.

A comprehensive description of what self-determined housing options could look like for this cohort can be summed up as follows: culturally informed, stable and permanent housing, independent from others, in rural locations, and accompanied by adequate support to learn practical living skills.

4.5   Conclusion

This chapter describes the findings of this research project, detailing the research participants' views of the housing needs of care leavers in New Zealand, as well as their specific self-determined views about desired housing options.

While the research was intended to be future focused, with the goal of drawing out youth-led positive solutions to housing needs, participants began their interviews by drawing on their past negative housing experiences. This involved each young person highlighting gaps in their prior and current housing placements that required immediate attention.

Initially, participants were preoccupied with their fundamental physiological needs being met but over the course of the interviews, they felt more at ease describing specific and tailored housing choices. These fundamental needs were articulated in terms of stability, safety, and security. Participants wanted to know that they were guaranteed shelter before sharing more detailed perspectives. They also criticised the temporary nature of their current housing placements and highlighted the need for permanent housing as an immediate priority. Without prompting, many participants returned frequently to their plea for stable shelter, repeatedly emphasising the immediate threat they felt to their current housing stability.

The experience of moving multiple times within the care system, followed by further housing instability after exiting care, painted a sobering picture of the lack of housing stability for the sample cohort (as shown in Figure 1, p. 105).

Equally, the common stories of episodic homelessness—experienced by 50% of participants—further emphasised the consequences of a system operating without a robust housing strategy (as shown in Figure 2, p. 106). Although the sample for this research was limited to ten care leavers, the rate of homelessness experienced within it in the immediate period after leaving care is alarming.

UK research conducted by Kilkenny (2012) concluded that housing displacement among youth heightens the risk of long-term homelessness. Such vulnerabilities to long-term homelessness were apparent in this New Zealand study also. Kilkenny reported that up to 20% of care leavers in the UK would experience homelessness in their first two years after leaving care. Fowler et al. (2017) observed a similar risk profile for American care leavers.

While the sample interviewed in this research cannot be said to be representative of the entire care leaving group in New Zealand, it does offer an indicative picture of the prevalence of housing instability for care leavers in Aotearoa. Especially when considering the vulnerability to homelessness amongst these New Zealand participants, which was more than twice that recorded for UK and US teens. The high number of participants who experienced homelessness after leaving care should raise an urgent alarm for authorities, as it presents a grim and concerning picture of the housing insecurity care leavers experience in New Zealand.

Compared to other jurisdictions, the evidence surrounding the prevalence of housing instability in this research should be a warning sign of the risk of long-term homelessness for care leavers in New Zealand at the current time.

Participants were quick to emphasise that their desire for access to youth-specific housing options could not be accomplished without more intensive social support. In particular, support from a lived-experience workforce ranked highly, alongside strong cultural responsiveness for Māori. Further investigation of the cultural implications for housing options suitable for rangatahi Māori are explored in depth in the Discussion chapter.

Participants also requested tailored social work support that could adapt and respond to individual needs, instead of a one-size-fits-all approach. In simple terms, participants desired guaranteed, stable, and supported housing.

The needed support described by participants includes practical and regular training for independent living. Participants sought more coaching on how to live as adults outside the care system, and stressed that their ability to adapt to adult living would not happen immediately. They needed time to learn, adapt to, and master new skills. Interestingly, each young person acknowledged their lack of competency in undertaking basic tasks critical to independent living. Any future support must include practical training on tasks such as how to cook, make a bed, clean, manage a budget, and hold a tenancy.

Furthermore, participants were insistent on the importance of the location of housing as part of future housing considerations. A somewhat surprising call for rural and close-to-nature placements was prevalent among participants: Aroha, Leoni, Nora, Jess, and Rāwiri all emphasised its importance. As the researcher sought to understand which specific housing types appealed most to the cohort, a variety of choices emerged. Although the interest in rural living was not supported by any lived experience by individuals in the group, it remains an interesting and intriguing aspect of their responses warranting further investigation.

Participants identified apartment living, family homes in the suburbs, and simple tiny home or cabin accommodation as their chosen housing types, with apartments and standalone housing being the most popular. Single young people tended to choose the apartment as an option, while the mothers in the group wanted accommodation that resembled more of a family home environment. Overall, the importance of the type of housing paled in comparison to calls for stable, permanent dwellings (of unspecified type) with links to supportive adults who could train and coach the youth in adult living.

The ability to choose youth-specific housing free from environments that included vulnerable adults was important for participants whose post-care housing history included placements in emergency housing settings in close proximity to unsafe adults. Participants also vocalised a desire to be housed separately from their peers and family. Each participant recounted previous troublesome housing placements in crowded family or group settings which they wished to avoid in the future. With this in mind, they sought independent living options separated from the challenges of shared living. Most participants had, for many years,

been told who they were going to live with and had been forced to move from place to place, without ever arriving in an environment they could call their own.

Most importantly, youth wanted choice. They understood the current policy of returning care leavers to their family of origin as they exited care but cautioned that in many cases this strategy was fraught with challenges and pitfalls. They described difficulties in their own lives where they had been sent back to dangerous and unsafe family environments that made them more vulnerable to immediate housing instability and homelessness.

Finally, there was a firm and impassioned call across the interviews for greater attention to be placed on youth housing in New Zealand followed by a voiced desire for housing policy that categorised care leavers as a prioritised group for social housing. Participants wanted their housing needs to be taken seriously and acted upon with urgency.

The findings from these interviews revealed how motivated care leavers can be to help develop solutions to the challenges they face around housing, and confirmed that a commitment to pursue more collegial strategies between authorities and youth around housing choice would be well-received by the young people.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

5.1   Introduction

The evidence from the findings show a stark contrast between the participants' post-care housing instability and their desire for more stable, supported, and tailored housing choices. In response to the core research question of what self-determined options would look like for care leavers, participants voiced the need for stable, permanent accommodation, with opportunities to learn critical skills for independent living. Their views mirror international research, highlighted in the literature review, which prioritises a strong housing response for care leavers, the promotion and endorsement of tailored supports, and hearing the voices of care leavers themselves regarding any post-care living arrangements.

The housing choices of participants in this study varied widely, with apartments and standalone housing featuring as the most desirable, followed by tiny homes and cabin accommodation. Hence, no single housing typology emerged as more desirable than another. Interestingly, participants emphasised the importance of housing locations near nature and receiving cultural support that acknowledges their history and whakapapa.

Participants also voiced the need to prioritise a youth voice and leadership in decisions on housing before being discharged from care. Their calls for more involvement in decisions at the point of care transition are not new and are widely recognised in other jurisdictions. As noted in the literature review, when youth contribute to decisions that affect them, better outcomes occur (Park et al., 2020). However, no participant within this research could recall any substantive efforts by authorities to listen to their views before making decisions on their exit from care, despite a legislative obligation to do so. The researcher struggled to uncover evidence of any such consultation taking place at any time.

The care leaving housing experiences conveyed by participants match those of their international peers where housing instability is commonplace and can result in care leavers being more vulnerable to homelessness (Mendes, 2018). Participants voiced a need for, at a minimum, supports that adequately meet their physiological needs, including the guarantee for safe, warm, and stable shelter. The researcher's efforts to uncover desired housing choices amongst the cohort was somewhat stymied by the gross lack of any real experience of

adequate housing. Astonishing reports of motel living, life on the streets, and bouncing between tenancies were all too common throughout the interviews. The longest housing placement in care was eight months, evidence that exposes disturbing and lengthy histories of housing instability.

The post-care housing experiences revealed in the research should raise an alarm considering the current care system's lack of responsibility in prioritising housing support for those exiting care. Findings reveal a need to treat both housing and ongoing life skills support as non-negotiable for care leavers, especially when recognising that care leavers have long been identified as one of society's most vulnerable and at-risk groups (Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2004).

Sadly, participant responses revealed a consistent experience of unstable housing across the entire sample. The ease with which participants fell through system gaps during their transition, resulting in periods of episodic homelessness and motel dwelling, is troubling and yet, unfortunately, not surprising. As noted, their experience is congruent with findings from previous research on this topic, for example Ward (2000), who warned of rushed exits contributing to poor outcomes for care leavers in New Zealand. Worldwide trends show that a lack of investment and resourcing for care leavers can result in failure to navigate the final hurdle of their care experience, forcing care leavers into short-term, inappropriate, and uncertain housing, and sometimes directly into homelessness.

Broad (1996) observed heightened risks of homelessness, substance abuse, and mental health distress for UK care leavers. Similar risks were echoed in the stories told, and comments made, by each young person in this New Zealand study with 50% of participants having experienced episodes of homelessness soon after being discharged. Mental health distress also emerged as a risk associated with inadequate housing, as evidenced by care leavers recounting the emotional impacts of housing displacement on their wellbeing. Simpson at el. (2017) reported that housing instability can be detrimental to positive long-term mental health outcomes for New Zealand youth leaving care. The impact of housing instability on the personal wellbeing of participants in this project supports Simpson at el. (2017) observations, and raises concerns about declining mental health of care leavers whose housing circumstances become unstable after care.

Importantly, participants could not talk about housing choice and housing options without simultaneously emphasising the vital role of training and support. As emphasised in research within other jurisdictions (and as noted in Chapter Four), training and preparation supports need to accompany the introduction of any new housing programmes. Independent living is not achieved without intentional training and support. Participants, recognising their lack of skills and capability to navigate adult life, were quick to point this out.

These skills include managing one's own accommodation and performing basic tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and budgeting. While participants wanted to learn these skills, no one had taught them. As a result, they expressed feelings of being overlooked and devalued.

Mendes (2018) noted the importance of assessing a care leaver's readiness for exiting care based on more than just their age. A transition plan must include an evaluation of the young person's capabilities to live independently before they take the first step, not after. Maturity matters more than age (Mendes, 2018). However, the current transition system uses age as the predominant indicator of readiness to exit. Although more flexibility has been added to the policies in 2019 (see Chapter Two) relating to how a care leaver can exit the system, such as the remain and return option, stories from participants still included reports of rushed exits without any consideration of their capabilities and level of maturity.

While fundamental legislative changes have been made to support the journeys of care leavers within New Zealand, including the right to remain in and return to care until age 21, and funding has been made available for a transition service workforce (Oranga Tamariki, 2020), housing support structures appear scarce for the care leaving cohort. As noted, findings from the research showed the majority of young people bouncing between different short-term and inappropriate housing settings, indicating that housing support is significantly under-resourced, and is currently unable to respond adequately to care leaver needs.

5.2   Implications of the Research

Considering the findings of the current research, and in light of existing international and local literature, the researcher has identified several key implications of this project. Scarcely mentioned in the literature, they require discussion and further investigation. These implications include:

- The positive and surprising insights gained by the use of photovoice and photo-elicitation
- The difficulty and complexity of family housing placements as the immediate accommodation placement after care
- The potential link between a desire for a rural housing placement close to nature, and deeper themes of cultural dislocation from whenua and whakapapa
- The desire of young people to be housed separately from their peers.

The above implications lead to some tentative suggestions for improving housing outcomes for care leavers in New Zealand. These suggestions, which are explored below, should be read in light of the fact that this study is drawing on a qualitative data set from a relatively small sample of participants. The project was further limited by the lack of relevant New Zealand-based data and research. Other limitations of the project include geography (participants were living in the Auckland region only), and gender weighting (80% of participants identified as female).

Despite these limitations, valuable insights were still gained. These offer policymakers and child welfare practitioners a qualitative, but in-depth, understanding of how housing is viewed and prioritised by a small sample of care leavers in New Zealand.

5.2.1 Insights from Using Photovoice and Photo-elicitation

Utilising photovoice and photo-elicitation as data collection methods enhanced the researcher's ability to build rapport with participants. By adopting a method compatible with participatory action research, the researcher was able to genuinely place the participants at the centre of the project and thereby ensure all findings were client-centric (Walton et al., 2012). Engaging positive strengths-based methods for the project was critically important for the researcher given his profession as a youth worker and his desire to foster opportunities for genuine youth participation throughout.

Photovoice and photo-elicitation allowed the researcher the opportunity to conduct the data collection process using a democratic and equitable approach congruent with youth development practice principles. This ensured participants were empowered to be active contributors to the work (Macdonald, 2012). Youth could directly respond to the research questions by capturing images without being inhibited or censored, thus enabling self-

determined views to emerge unencumbered. Thus, photovoice and photo-elicitation became an equaliser in the research, offering the youth the autonomy to voice their individual views through a visual method, without the need for the researcher to be present.

The use of photovoice and photo-elicitation also supported the researcher's own professional and ethical commitment to strengths-based research. Adopting a strengths-based practice when working with young people in any context is a fundamental principle of the Youth Development Strategy of Aotearoa (YDSA), and one that the researcher is committed to uphold (New Zealand Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). The other core principles of the YDSA were also enhanced by the use of the photographic methods. These included a commitment to forming genuine relationships with youth, creating opportunities for youth to fully participate, and presenting good information shaped by the big picture (New Zealand Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002).

Offering youth the chance to actively collaborate during the data collection process meant the researcher received a greater investment of time and energy from the young people than would have otherwise been achieved, and thereby collected uniquely robust findings. The extra time invested with each young person prepared them for the photographic activities and earned the researcher a level of trust that helped to elevate and amplify youth voices.

By using photovoice and photo-elicitation, the researcher's understanding of care leaving housing choices, and how participants prioritised them, were enriched through visual narratives that accompanied verbal responses from interviews. The value of photovoice was originally promoted as a research method that could blend narrative and photographic imagery, resulting in deeper and more vivid explorations of a given subject (Wang & Burris, 1994). Indeed, the inclusion of photovoice offered an additional visual layer of knowledge, expanding the volume of data beyond the researcher's initial expectations and providing enriching visual depictions of participants' housing needs. In addition, it allowed room for the participants to explore the research subject of housing choices in both literal and symbolic ways. More generally, behind the lens of a camera, participants had the time and tools to visually explore their perspectives on housing, its importance, and any particular housing types that piqued their interest. During the interviews, the photos allowed for honest and candid insights which may not have emerged otherwise.

By engaging the young people through the photographic activities, the researcher asked participants to do more than simply attend an interview. Youth gained an opportunity to interpret their lives and needs through pictures (and learn a few photography skills along the way). The acquisition of soft skills as part of the data collection process may support participants beyond the boundaries of the research, helping to build their confidence (Budig et al., 2018).

Strack et al. (2004) reported that the process of introducing youth to a photographic participatory method such as photovoice builds self-esteem and self-confidence in and of itself. The confidence displayed by participants in this research supports Strack et al. (2014) claims. The invitation to contribute as creators of visual content for this project was received with enthusiasm from young people who had experienced a history of disempowerment by being shut out of decision-making processes that affect their futures (Lee & Berrick, 2014).

Photovoice was particularly useful in that it engaged a digital visual medium. Because all the participants are part of a generation familiar with smartphone technology and social media—the oldest was born in 2000—it was easy for them to grasp and engage with the activity. The immediate success of using photovoice with an at-risk sample could offer benefits to other researchers seeking high levels of participation and engagement from vulnerable young people.

An example of new insights gained through the inclusion of photographic methods is the theme that emerged to be housed closer to nature and in rural settings. All the participants drew on the content in their photos to convey their thoughts on the desirability of rural placements, land, and nature. Photos of green spaces, land, and sea acted as key prompts for the young people, enabling them to expand their views on housing beyond bricks and mortar and revealing seemingly peripheral, yet important, musings on environment, place, and a desire to connect with their ancestry (discussed below).

Interestingly, after capturing images of housing types that suited their individual needs, participants were better prepared to speak about their preferred housing options, using the photos they had collected as visual aids. With multiple images of different kinds of housing, young people were able to easily distinguish their preferences using their photos to guide them. Equally, photovoice enabled the researcher to resource participants to discover their own views with the support of a creative activity.

Once the photovoice activity was completed, participants showed enthusiasm and interest in discussing the images they had captured. With greater personal investment in the project than might have been achieved through interviewing alone, participants spoke freely of their past housing experience and their desires for housing in the future, drawing thoughtfully on meanings connected to their photographs. When the researcher posed questions for which a response could not be linked to a photo, participants were less confident to engage. In addition, the photos gave the researcher additional content to ponder, leading to greater understanding of the housing needs of the sample overall.

The photovoice activity also offered an access point into the research dialogue, reducing the intensity of attention on the young people at the beginning of each interview. The researcher found the inclusion of photos to have a relaxing and calming effect. He also observed the photos playing a unique role in kindling further dialogue when participants had seemingly finished describing their insights on a particular subject. This was especially true regarding the theme of gaining stability.

Stability was a term which the young people used frequently but struggled to articulate or define without referencing their photos. Images of locked gates, standalone housing, and secluded environments added specifics to the participant narratives of what stability would look like for them. In this way, the young people were able to visualise specific attributes of their preferred type and location of housing.

It is highly unlikely that the insights revealed using photovoice would have surfaced in the same way without the use of a visual method. The photos and their accompanying explanations have played a pivotal role in shaping the research findings. In offering a visually dynamic and compelling narrative, the researcher hopes this project will inspire others to adopt similar creative methods and commit to sharing the power of data collection with participants themselves.

5.2.2 Reservations Regarding Post-Care Family Placements Need Attention

In New Zealand, the strategy of placing care leavers with their biological family after care is current practice. It is a part of legislation seeking to maintain and strengthen the relationship between family and the young person (Oranga Tamariki Act, 1989). In this context, it is important to note that accepting family placements as the immediate post-care

housing environment was met with resistance by participants in this project. For most of the youth, their exit from care corresponded with a family housing placement they were reluctant to take up.

While all ten participants were interested in reconnecting with family and re-establishing relationship, especially the seven rangatahi Māori who sought connections with their wider hapū and iwi, they also expressed serious reservations about family placements as their initial housing option. This was because of relationship difficulties with family members and past hurts which could act as potential barriers to their personal progress.

Despite this hesitancy, the New Zealand policy of seeking to reunite, maintain, and strengthen family relationships is one to be applauded. The commitment is shown by recent inclusions in legislation that prioritise Māori cultural needs in Section 7AA of the Oranga Tamariki Act (1989), as well as Section 386AAC which specifically notes the importance of giving care leavers leadership in decisions concerning their future beyond care. However, in each separate case, the implementation of these obligations and supporting policies needs to be investigated against evidence relating to the physical, social, and economic environments a young person is being sent into, and their current and historical relationship with family.

Of critical importance is the care and attention needed from decision-makers when considering the effect of a family placement on a young person's wellbeing. To do so effectively, decision-makers are obligated and mandated within Oranga Tamariki legislation to offer the young person the chance to participate in important decision-making affecting their future, including post-care placements (Oranga Tamariki Act, 1989).

Unfortunately, no interviewees for this project were consulted about decisions for them to be housed (or not) with family immediately after care. This is a direct violation of Oranga Tamariki's legislative obligation to give care leavers more leadership in decision-making. Section 386AAC (a) of the Act states: "the young person is to increasingly lead decisions about matters affecting them and is to be supported by adults to do this (Oranga Tamariki Act, 1989, p. 371)."

Stories from the young people describing the way decisions were made about post-care housing placements raise questions about how much say they have, despite the legislative obligation to offer it.

Fauth et al. (2012) findings in the UK emphasised the importance of involving care leavers in decisions about their future living placements, arguing that including young people in these decisions is more likely to lead to stable accommodation placements after care. Fauth et al. (2012) observations were supported by the stories of young people within this New Zealand research. It should be noted it is possible that resistance to family placements after care voiced in this project had as much to do with the lack of consultation with the care leavers as it did with the family environments and relationships themselves. Any conclusive position on this matter would require further investigation.

The difficulties with making family of origin placements the predominant housing option for care leavers is well-documented in international literature. Sting and Groinig (2020) note that "typical reasons for being in care include stressful or even traumatising experiences in the family of origin, such as neglect, violence, abuse, the parents' inability to raise or care for their children, or even parental absence (p. 141)." There are valid reasons why youth do not want to return immediately to the places from which they were uplifted. For some, the reasons are based on the trauma they experienced in the home which lead to genuine fears of a re-enactment of family breakdowns and the resurfacing of significant past conflicts.

When family ties are cut off for good, care leavers can be left on their own to navigate young adult life, without the necessary family support (Sting & Groinig, 2020). While participants were against the thought of being housed back with family as a fait accompli, they were also clear they did not want ties with their family of origin to be lost for good. To the contrary, participants appealed for more support from state agencies for their parents so that their interactions with them could be safe, and stronger relationships could be nurtured. As Crystal noted in her interview:

> Don't just focus on the child. Focus on the family. Like, for instance, my Dad. You know, they could have helped him. They could have, I don't know, they could have taken him to rehab or something. Instead of just working with me.

Crystal did not want to return to a living situation with her Dad. She also did not want her Dad to remain stuck in his personal hardship either, and voiced a desire to be in relationship with him. These two positions present distinct issues needing attention and debate.

First, more care and caution must be applied to the approach of placing care leavers back with family as their immediate housing placement beyond care. Yet, the desire to live in a separate abode from family is distinctly different from the care leaver's interest in maintaining and strengthening family connections and should not be misconstrued as a reluctance to cultivate any relationship at all. Concerns that participants raised around family placements had more to do with the perceived safety and appropriateness of the family environments in question at a particular point in time than they did about fostering deeper relationships with family after care.

Second, and as Crystal emphasises above, more attention needs to be placed on supports and assistance for families whose children are within the care of the state. Importantly, effective culturally appropriate and whānau-centred approaches within the care system would benefit family relationships not only at the point when those who have been in care exit care, but also throughout care histories. The use of western modalities of care that are not in keeping with culturally appropriate, whānau-centred approaches have, in particular (though not exclusively), disadvantaged Māori for decades.

Mendes (2011) discusses the risk of the loss of cultural identity citing vulnerabilities for care leavers to cultural violations as pervasive across jurisdictions. Warnings of systemic cultural neglect within the New Zealand care system specifically were reported in Atwool's (2018) findings, which documented the prevalence of cultural disregard in the New Zealand care system dating back to the 1980s. Cultural neglect is not limited to the experiences of care leavers, but rather extends to the whānau members from whom the care leavers were uplifted and points to both wider generational grievances that remain unaddressed and to the ongoing impacts of colonisation.

Lawson-Te Aho et al. (2019) found that relational and cultural losses contribute to the risk of housing instability and long-term homelessness for whānau Māori:

> Colonisation and the breakdown of cultural support means there are many Māori with no active connection to their whānau. Classification of whānau for whom cultural knowledge was lost led them to states of disorganisation (whānau wetewete); whānau who lack respect for each other (whānau tūkino); restricted families (whānau pōhara) who are well intentioned but often lack the resources to take action to realise their aspirations and hopes, and isolated whānau (whānau tū-mokemoke) who are alienated from Māori networks. They struggle to reclaim knowledge of who they are (p. 2).

Lawson-Te Aho et al. (2019) raises concerns about the wider and sweeping effects of colonisation on Māori, including impacts on whānau connections to cultural knowledge and networks. Considering the vulnerabilities of Māori care leavers to housing instability after care, it is reasonable to trace some of their circumstances to the effects of losing knowledge, identity, and connection to their Māori roots, effects which could impact the potential success of any whānau housing placements thereafter. It is not good enough simply to return care leavers to whānau, without considering the cultural needs of the care leaver and their whānau alike, and without responding with appropriate actions to help ensure, where possible, that the re-establishment of relationship leads to reunion, and not annulment.

Such actions were obviously absent in the experiences of Māori care leavers interviewed in this research. These measures must include a commitment to offering culturally specific supports to strengthen both parties during a critical period of reconnection.

The support must be applied as strongly to whānau as it is to the care leaver. The imperative for Oranga Tamariki to adopt such measures is already articulated in legislation, yet follow-through is not evidenced within the stories of the young people who participated in this research. According to a young wāhine Māori participant, Atawhai, little to no assistance had been given to her whānau member to prepare them to support her after she was discharged. Atawhai explained her experience of her housing placement with her grandmother after care:

> OT didn't even like, umm, help me with transitioning, they didn't even help me transition back to my nan. They thought everything was fine. My nan was struggling. My nan needed help with food. My nan needed help with us. We needed programmes and stuff, cause we were just moping around doing nothing, smoking drugs, bro…heaps of shit.

Throughout the interviews, participants repeatedly shared stories of being returned to whānau, and then quickly experiencing relational crises that led to housing instability and periods of episodic homelessness. For some participants, their relationships with whānau were too fragile to maintain any kind of stable living. For others, unresolved conflicts resurfaced and damaged the reunification as living in close quarters to their immediate family rekindled past disagreements which the youth and whānau members were not resourced or supported to address.

While it must be noted that two of the ten participants did experience stable living placements with their families after care, indicating that post-care family placements are still a worthy consideration at the point of transition, this was not the norm for participants in the current research. For most, the fragility and vulnerability of family reunification after care invariably led to unstable housing situations for participants that soon resulted in homelessness. Fifty percent of the participants experienced homelessness after care, the majority of whom were initially placed with their family of origin.

Nora described the sequence of movements in her post-care family living journey as follows:

> Ok, so when I left care I moved to my Mum's. Me and my Mum were not on good terms. I think it's because I just got out of OT and just had to build that relationship. But it just didn't work out for us… So after I left [care] to go stay at my Mum's, I ended up staying at a friend's [place], and after my friend's I ended up meeting my partner and staying at his house, and we went through some difficulties and [I] ended up being in emergency housing and underneath WINZ.

One could gather from Nora's experience that a family placement immediately after care contributed to housing instability due to lack of consultation on the placement in the first place, and an unstable relationship with her mother in the second. As noted above, Nora was not alone in her recollections of family placement difficulties after care within the sample.

Boddy (2019) challenged decision-makers in the UK to consider the potential long-term consequences of ignoring the importance of family relationships after care, presenting an argument for agencies to support the role of family connections after care. Boddy aptly describes the dilemma as follows:

> Families are complicated, diverse in their structures and in their practices. This is of course true for any family, and it is just as misleading to homogenise the "ordinary" family as it is for those families defined as troubling, including families of those who have been "in care"…Family in all its diversity forms part of dynamic and relational identities in care, when leaving care and into adult life. Relationships may simultaneously be experienced as positive and negative, supportive, and concerning— and may feel more or less like family over time (p. 2259).

Boddy (2019) is in favour of maintaining family links after care, acknowledging their role in identity formation and the dynamic nature of relationships which means they can change positively or negatively over time. Boddy argues for recognition of the complexities and diversities between one family and the next. She warns against categorising family

behaviours within a particular group, i.e., families of care leavers. Her point is that family relationships are not static, but dynamic in nature.

Sting and Groinig (2020) found that attachment relationships to family members were the most influential for care leavers long-term. For most, family and extended family members played a pivotal guiding role as care leavers manoeuvred through the challenges of independent life. Sting and Groinig (2020) contend that, unlike other supporting relationships for care leavers, e.g., with social workers, teachers, and coaches, family relationships remained the only ones that, for the most part, are irrevocable and indissoluble over a long-term period. Despite previous negative events and incidents with family members, care leavers are likely to rekindle and re-establish links with biological family members over time, and draw on them throughout their adult lives (Sting & Groinig, 2020). Therefore, the policy of pushing for stronger family involvement with care leavers is a positive one, but it is more complex and nuanced than care leavers simply being housed with family after exiting care, as demonstrated by Jenny's comments below:

> They say they are all about putting families back together, but maybe that is not the best option, so they should really try and focus on families but also housing for kids when they move out of OT, cause they don't think about that. Cause it's like, oh yeah, he's gone out of OT care. Next kid!

When considering the stories from participants about family placements after care in light of existing research on the role of family connections, it is important to remember the context of this current project. Young people were voicing a desire for their housing placement to be separate from their family of origin, not a desire to be separated from their family altogether.

As noted above (in Chapter Four), Jess, a wāhine Māori, stated the following about family placements for care leavers:

> Maybe they don't even want to go back to their family. Cause I didn't. I didn't want to go back. I wanted to be independent… maybe ask them where they wanna go. Where they would feel better living. Something like that instead of just giving them the options of family members.

Jess wanted youth to have the choice of independent housing options separate from family, stressing the importance of gaining independence at the point of transition.

Aroha described the need for the option to choose to live with family or to be accommodated separately from them, contextualising the choice based on the young person's personal circumstances. She noted:

> A person who is independent and wants to go off on their own, there should be options for them to pursue that. If there is a person who is leaving care and wants to go back and spend time with their family and whānau there should be options to pursue that.

Considering the small sample size of the current project, no definitive conclusion can be drawn on post-care family housing placements based on participants' reluctance to be placed with family. However, this project's findings do suggest that more consideration needs to be given to care leavers' relationships with whānau, hapū, and iwi, and to how their housing journeys could intersect with these relationships, both positively and negatively. Equally, ongoing and proactive support for families is needed to prepare youth and their families for possible reunification after care.

A fundamental question to address regarding family housing placements is, "whose voice do we listen to, and why?" In other words, are the youth in question mature enough to decide that family housing placements are not for them? Is the state making a mistake by sending care leavers back into the same environments from which they uplifted them, without their explicit and informed consent and approval?

The current research offers evidence—through the voices of young care leavers—that family housing placements for care leavers cannot remain as the default placement option on its own. Care leavers need to be granted personal agency around their post-care living environment choices, and be offered the opportunity to lead discussions on decisions about their future. These important principles are already in the legislation. Therefore, it is critical that a young person's right to choose where and with whom one lives is upheld. For some, this may lead to a decision for healthy housing placements with family after care, while for others, a chance to gain independent housing may be more desirable.

5.2.3   Desire for Connections to Nature Raise the Question of Cultural Dislocation

Being housed closer to nature and in more rural environments stood out as a unique finding within existing literature on care leaver housing.

There is no existing research on this topic in New Zealand, and little can be found on any added value or benefits of rural housing placements in reports from other countries. However, research in the UK did reveal challenges of housing youth rurally in comparison to urban placements. Mcghee (2015) observed difficulties with housing availability and a general lack of education and employment opportunities in rural locations across Scotland. Leyshon and DiGiovanna (2005) found that unsuitable housing stock and a lack of permanent job opportunities were deterrents for care-affected youth remaining in rural locations in Southern England. Yet, participants from this project voiced the desire for rural housing options and accommodation that are close to nature, with a large number of participants seeing rural locations specifically as a key part of their future preferred care leaver housing plans. As noted in the Findings chapter, their stated preferences in this regard were aspirational and not based on lived experience.

It is interesting to consider whether the desire for rural housing placements uncovered in the research was driven by a cultural need for connections to whenua, māoritanga, and whakapapa. The cultural relevance of rural housing placements is important to represent within the project, considering that Māori participants raised the issue as a priority. While all participants sought to be connected to nature and housed in rural locations, the question of cultural dislocation for rangatahi Māori was of particular note. It was especially significant given 70% of the sample identified as Māori. The discussion below is by no means definitive, but contains some key considerations and deliberations on this topic that could inform further study of the potential of culturally led housing placements for care leavers.

The significance of reconnecting with land, language, and cultural identity has been recognised in research on indigenous homelessness internationally. Thistle (2017) cites a renowned Canadian definition of indigenous homelessness: "individuals, families and communities isolated from their relationship to land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages and identities (p. 6)." When considering an indigenised response to housing for care leavers, one could conclude that relationship to land, history, and family are as important as the housing itself.

The definition of indigenous homelessness above rings true when reviewing the responses from participants in this research. The desire for housing close to nature was incredibly strong. Each young person captured photos of trees, plants, land, and water to convey the importance of closeness to nature.

Notably, rangatahi Māori described the chance at a housing placement close to nature as a chance to put down their roots. The terminology used in this instance was not repeated in data aligned with any other theme, but was drawn upon by multiple rangatahi when voicing the importance of rural housing. Rangatahi described putting down their roots as a way of deepening their connection to a place and committing to a location where lasting relationships could form. In this way, Māori participants may have been drawing on deeper connections to place, people, culture, and land within their Māori history.

Aroha articulated a direct link between her culture as a wāhine Māori, and the significance of being housed near her ancestors. She conveyed her desire to be housed more rurally by saying, "Yeah, I think [about] a connection to my land also. You know for someone my own age. So, I have a connection to my roots and to my ancestors."

Crystal, a wāhine Māori, described the importance of natural settings: "Take everybody back to their roots before they become independent so they can learn how to live off the land."

The value of a connection to tribal land in rural settings was explicit from Aroha and Crystal and was echoed more implicitly by other Māori participants throughout the interviews. Rāwiri simply noted, "I want to be out by the water. Not living out on the water, but I wouldn't mind moving out there." Similarly, Leoni sought housing closer to nature without explicitly describing it as a cultural need: "if I was to live anywhere, I would like to live near the beach. Next to the water so I can take my kids for a swim."

When Leoni was asked about the importance of cultural supports for her as a care leaver, she responded by speaking about the cultural needs of her two children and linking them to place and ancestry: "I want them to know where they come from and what it was like growing up, and it would just be good for my kids to learn their whakapapa from way back on both sides, so yeah."

Responses like those of Aroha, Crystal, and Leoni raise the question of whether Māori participants were conveying thoughts about their experiences of cultural dislocation as they emphasised the need for rural housing. Rangatahi Māori wanted the chance to be housed closer to their tipuna to form deeper bonds with their whakapapa. Māori participants also expressed a desire to establish strong relationships with their hapū and iwi, seeking cultural

connections they had lost while in state care. Wirihana and Smith (2014) note the importance of a connection to ancestry and land in bringing healing to generational trauma:

> Generational wellbeing and acknowledging the importance of ancestry is also inherent to Māori wellbeing. Whakapapa in traditional Māori society formed the foundation of all Māori social and kinship relationships. Moreover, Māori retained and acknowledged the influence of previous generations by constant reconnection with their ancestors. Celebrating the connections ancestors had with their natural environments maintained this practice as Māori believed their ancestors became kaitiaki for tribal areas and have a protective relationship towards their descendants. (p. 204).

Wirihana and Smith contend that the natural environment and connection to ancestry are critical in establishing wellbeing for Māori. Their insights lend support to the idea that care leavers were drawing on cultural needs when referencing the importance of rural locations and nature in their photographic and verbal responses during this project. Lawson-Te Aho et al. (2019) observations align with Wirihana and Smith (2014) claims, describing a framework to guide actions on Māori/indigenous homelessness which includes the importance of connecting to whenua and whakapapa. While the focus of Lawson-Te Aho et al. (2019) article is homelessness, its commentary on housing needs for Māori are relevant to the needs of rangatahi Māori interviewed in this project, as the participants across the two projects had similar experiences of housing instability:

> In Māori cultural narratives, land is personified as Papatūānuku, earth mother from whom all terrestrial life springs and to which all returns in death. Māori were traditionally organised as small whānau/family units and hapū/sub tribes/collectives of whānau bonded to locations by communal practices such as māra kai/gardening, resource utilisation, defence against invaders, burial sites and the consecration of sacred sites. Māori homelessness is about considerably more than a structure or dwelling (p. 5).

Considering the voices of the Māori participants who identified rural locations as a desired housing choice, one could conclude that the interest in living rurally was at least partly driven by a fundamental cultural need to connect to land, place, whānau, and whakapapa.

Hence, people and place are critical factors to consider for Māori and need to be interpreted as essential and inseparable aspects of any future housing supports. For rangatahi Māori to live without adequate housing is of greater significance than homelessness and housing instability per se. It feeds a generational cultural dislocation that further alienates

rangatahi Māori from their Māoritanga. As Rout et al.'s (2019) report aptly titled

"Homelessness and Landlessness," declares:

> Housing is intrinsically connected with land, home ownership implies land ownership. While land 'ownership' is a western concept, a connection to land is a critical component of Māori identity as encompassed by the concepts of mana whenua [authority over land or territory] and tūrangawaewae [where one has rights of residence and belonging]. Land is an ancestor and the source of personal and familial psychological and physical wellbeing. Alienation from land is more than just the loss of a resource or the loss of political autonomy – it is also a direct assault on Māori identity…(pp. 12-13).

In her interview for the current project, Atawhai articulated the importance of cultural rights and connections to land in ways that are harmonious with Rout et al. (2019) description, yet verbalised in youthful and passionate prose:

> And another image that I got is… land! Heaps and heaps and heaps of land and grass and trees… so my house can be planted on my land. I would like to own land, so my family don't have to scrounge off the white man. To be somewhere. To feel like they [my children] are home somewhere. They got a home. It's there. They don't have to go pay the white man to live in their houses. Why? I already got a house. It's on my land. So come and live with me. That's what that [the image] means.

An image taken by Atawhai demonstrating her longing for her own land.

It could be argued that the desire of participants to return to their cultural roots, and more broadly to be housed in rural locations, reveals a much deeper cultural longing for restored identity. Where did these young people belong now that they had exited the care system? And with whom did they seek belonging?

In the case of rangatahi Māori, a desire for belonging within wider cultural whānau connections was clear in the interviews, alongside a request for housing to be near or on ancestral lands.

Interestingly, the desire to find belonging within their Iwi context emerged alongside a reluctance (explored in the previous section) to be housed with their family of origin immediately after care. Māori participants sought deep connections with their extended whānau and hapū but did not want to return to past whānau environments that they deemed unsafe and relationally fragile. Cultural connectedness from participants' perspectives had a far wider reach than one's family of origin alone, extending to relationships rooted within their wider tribal connections.

While Oranga Tamariki is currently obligated through legislation to meet the cultural needs of those in care, including care leavers, no evidence could be found during this project of any housing programmes delivered on ancestral lands. It is hoped that, in the future, decision-makers will take seriously the desire for culturally-led housing responses voiced by rangatahi Māori in the current research.

The findings of this research raise concerns around current cultural competencies within the transition service workforce at Oranga Tamariki, and on the part of those responsible for supporting care leavers with their housing needs at WINZ. The Māori participants were quick to raise their desires and expectations for greater cultural supports on their way to finding permanent housing but, in the same breath, they dismissed the current efforts of Oranga Tamariki to live up to their own stated goals outlined in the 7AA standards (Oranga Tamariki, 2020). These standards prioritise the implementation of a range of measures that uphold the mana of Māori in care, reduce disparities, and increase cultural responsiveness. Sadly, the level of grief expressed by Māori participants as they retold stories of neglect in their interactions with Oranga Tamariki gave the researcher little confidence that the 7AA standards were adopted effectively at an operational level.

Atawhai, a young 19-year-old wāhine Māori expressed her anger and frustration at the way she was treated:

> I was dragged into a system that was rigged. Like, their system is rigged. It's corrupted. Like… their taking taitamariki into their care and sending them out, just like that, with nothing. Nothing to cloak them in the garden in the wild. Pretty much

just send them back to the streets. Take them off the streets just to send them back to the streets. That's pretty much how I see it. Well, I see OT has done [that]. They took me off the streets just to put me back on the streets.

The level of distrust and disillusionment with the actions of Oranga Tamariki from within the sample, as demonstrated by Atawhai's words, cannot be overstated.

While this research project did not set out to explore cultural needs of care leavers, every Māori participant voiced a desire for more adaptive and responsive cultural supports within housing programmes. Rangatahi Māori stressed the importance of the development of culturally informed housing supports, which prioritised their need to be housed closer to hapū, iwi, and within a culturally safe environment.

5.2.4   The Desire for Independent Housing Options

The desire to be housed alone was voiced strongly by participants and raises some questions that are worth considering for youth housing developments in New Zealand. Fifty percent of participants specifically named independent living choices as their preferred housing model, as shown in Table 4 in the Findings chapter.

The housing types chosen for independent living included apartments, tiny homes, cabins, and independent units. While only half of the sample specifically named independent housing types as their housing placement of choice, the entire sample expressed concern about being housed in shared living circumstances with their peers. This then begs the question, why has New Zealand failed to introduce more than one housing option for care leavers when their needs as a group clearly necessitate more than a single shared living model of housing?

Despite the significant body of evidence on the merits and benefits of independent housing models internationally, New Zealand has fallen behind comparative jurisdictions and remains intent on delivering one model of housing support only, that being supported accommodation where youth live in mixed flatting arrangements.

While the supported accommodation model of housing has its merits, including a focus on growing independent living skills, opportunities to learn to live in a mixed flatting environment, and onsite or daily social worker support, it also presents challenges and

limitations that make it unsuitable for some care leavers. The key difficulty is that it can lead to negative peer-to-peer interactions for some youth.

This is why participants in this research were quick to articulate their personal need for independent options separate from the supported living model currently on offer. When asked what housing options would work best for her, Crystal, a young wāhine Māori, commented: "Just like, apartments, but not all cluttered together. Like move into different areas where you don't know anyone and you can start fresh."

While writing the literature review, the researcher discovered Independent Living Programmes (ILPs) functioning in other jurisdictions which offer care leavers individual housing placements located in independent units, accompanied by social worker support. ILPs have been adopted widely in other countries and have a positive reputation (Lemon et al., 2005). Yet, Oranga Tamariki has not moved to investigate and introduce independent youth housing models in New Zealand. With strong care leaver support for more individual housing options, it is disappointing that New Zealand has remained beholden to one (congregate) housing model alone.

A recent New Zealand-focused report on accommodation support was released in June 2021, describing a broader group of housing options that could be considered for care leavers (Malatest International, 2021). The report mentioned models also covered in Chapter Two of this thesis including foyer housing, independent housing, and scattered-site housing models. In its conclusion, the Malatest International review raises some critical questions about housing options for care leavers in the New Zealand context, including the disadvantage care leavers face in navigating their housing needs as they leave care. The review states:

> Aotearoa New Zealand wide housing shortages and a lack of affordable options have been reported in interviews and evaluations of a range of programmes for young people. Young people leaving care are at a disadvantage in competition for affordable housing because they may not have the identification required to access benefits and references and experience flatting. Some young people leaving care are not ready to live independently (p. 21).

The Malatest International (2021) review also includes an acknowledgement that the current supported living model may work for some youth, as long as they are suited to a congregate style of living. This implies that other options may be needed for those who are

not suited to congregate living (p. 21). The review falls short of making any bold statements about the value or importance of introducing new housing models in the New Zealand context, or any independent living alternatives to the supported housing model currently on offer.

Although housing expansion for care leavers, as called for in Oranga Tamariki's (2018) report, is cited as a priority in New Zealand's Homelessness Action Plan (2020), progress towards these goals is difficult to measure and was not available to the researcher (Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, 2020). No other reports could be cited in the New Zealand context to strengthen or contrast with the Malatest International (2021) review. It remains unclear whether the latter review will lead to any further investigation of new housing models for care leavers in Aotearoa New Zealand.

When considering why New Zealand has not introduced independent housing options for youth, we need to acknowledge, and critically question, the limited information available to validate its need. To begin with, the size of care leaving housing needs is not easy to determine due to the limited and selective information within Oranga Tamariki reports. What we do know is that approximately 600 care leavers are supported each year by Oranga Tamariki (Malatest International, 2021). What is less well-known is the housing status of those 600 youth.

To discover the housing needs amongst care leavers, the researcher had to submit two official information applications (OIAs) to Oranga Tamariki, and the results did not include the size or scale of unmet housing needs within this group. What was discovered and reported in Chapter Two was that at the time of the request (September 2020), Oranga Tamariki had 756 youth in its transition out of care service and only 59 funded beds, clearly demonstrating a gap between accommodation need and supply (Official Information Application, Oranga Tamariki, June 2021).

The lack of information held by Oranga Tamariki on the housing circumstances and needs of care leavers prevented the researcher from being able to present definitive findings on the size of need in New Zealand. However, further OIAs lodged with the Ministry of Social Development in 2020 and 2021 did reveal that, at the time of the requests, close to 2,000 youth aged between 16-24 years resided in unsupported motel accommodation across

the country (Official Information Request, Ministry of Social Development, 2021). However, the Ministry could not advise how many of these young people presented with a care history.

It appears that no government agency holds verifiable data on the volume of housing needed to respond to housing instability concerns among the care leaving cohort. At the very least, it would be prudent for the Ministry of Social Development and Oranga Tamariki to coordinate to determine how many youth living in motels have a care history. Doing so would provide a better understanding of the scale of housing need for young people leaving care in New Zealand. Such a move would offer at least some indicative data to spark further research and investigation into where New Zealand care leavers end up living, how many fall into homelessness and housing precarity, and what can be done to reverse negative trends.

Unfortunately, there is also significant lack of data and information in the New Zealand context to inform decisions about what youth housing models need to look like here, and what options care leavers themselves prefer. Despite the existence of one-off reviews like the Malatest International (2021) report, the body of knowledge on youth housing for care leavers is sparse. No substantive longitudinal studies on care leavers could be cited in this current work, and very few post-graduate projects have focused on care leavers locally, let alone their housing needs. Consequently, the researcher found it impossible to compare the findings in this research to any other substantial body of New Zealand data.

Still, it is important for New Zealand to consider other models of youth housing, apart from the supported living model currently on offer, that include training for independence as a core component of their delivery. It is safe to assume from participant responses in this research that one model of youth housing in isolation cannot respond to the multiplicity of needs and challenges facing a diverse group of care leavers.

As noted above, the sole model on offer presents challenges such as negative peer-to-peer influence, which leave some care leavers in similar vulnerable relational circumstances to those experienced with family placements in the past. Such circumstances can prevent youth from making personal progress toward their goals, and stunt their growth during a critical time in life (Gifford-Smith et al., 2005).

Rāwiri voiced his concerns about congregate living using indelicate language, but emphasising the point well: "If you are hanging out with idiots you are going to become one. It's just how it is."

Rāwiri's concerns relate to the negative peer-to-peer influence he experienced in congregate housing settings after he had left care. Crystal had a more cynical perspective on the current absence of independent housing choices, stating "…that [the introduction of independent options] is probably never going to happen because the easiest way to manage the youth is by putting them together. But it is also the hardest thing for the youth to come out of."

Crystal's perspective deserves further consideration, especially when considering the introduction of more housing support options in New Zealand. She stated that it is easier to house youth together than to offer them more tailored, and independent, choices. There is an economic rationale for funding congregate housing as the sole youth housing model, as it is less costly than the independent alternatives. Yet, Crystal also points out that congregate models of housing are very difficult for (at least some, perhaps many) youth to succeed in. Decision-makers should consider that, while the short-term costs of congregate housing make economic sense, the long-term price of care leavers falling out of group housing settings could be high and nullify any fiscal savings.

Observations by Mendes (2011) in Australia questioned the wisdom of under-investment in supports for care leavers when considering the critical nature of their final step out of care and the associated costs if their transition fails. The question of what drives New Zealand's singular focus on group housing for care leavers remains unanswered. Is it the cost of housing? Is it a lack of knowledge pertaining to the long-term benefits of independent models offered elsewhere? Or is it something else?

Further investigation of the ILP models which offer independent apartment living with support in other jurisdictions is warranted. Such programmes have proven track records and could be implemented alongside the supported living model, strengthening New Zealand's youth housing offering overall. Independent placements separate from peers will not work for all care leavers, so the supported living model which encourages mixed flatting would still be valuable to retain in a mix of housing models on offer. Innovative youth housing solutions for care leavers such as the Australian Kids Under Cover programme

referenced in Chapter Two are also worth consideration. Kids Under Cover place cabins on the back yards of family or extended family properties, offering care leavers more independent living while remaining close to adults who care about them. Aroha supported the idea of a similar model to Kids Under Cover being introduced in New Zealand through her passion for simple tiny home living:

> Yeah, I think tiny home living would be good for kids leaving care… You know, ones who do want to transition on their own, to be on their own. Because essentially it is easy living, they can learn how to do everything in that house, cause it's tiny, it's simple and it's easy.

There may also be room for further consideration and exploration of transitional living spaces where young people learn independent skills with intensive, live-in supports as suggested in the Malatest International (2018) report. Glynn and Mayock (2020) described these environments as liminal spaces where young people have a chance to practice independence. Their work advocated for a safety net of support that avoided issues like evictions into homelessness or falling out of touch with transition services altogether.

Liminal spaces are living environments where it is okay to make mistakes. Such environments exist in the supported living context locally, where care leavers transition into a mixed flatting context with daily social work supports. However, independent transitional spaces where care leavers learn to live on their own and separate from others are not currently available in New Zealand. The absence of any real independent accommodation choice that avoids youth living in close proximity to one another remains an obvious gap in the current youth housing offering in New Zealand. It is a gap that should receive more attention.

More investigation into the size and scope of care leaver housing is urgent. If decision-makers do not grow the offering of youth housing for care leavers in New Zealand, they will struggle to demonstrate their progress on a stated commitment for increasing housing support in the New Zealand's Homelessness Action Plan (Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, 2020). Yet, without the evidence to show the scale of housing instability for care leavers, and the relative effectiveness of current responses, New Zealand will remain blind to the wider challenges and issues facing care leavers in their housing journeys.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

6.1   Summary of Research Findings

The research met the aim of exploring the self-determined housing needs of youth who had exited the care system in New Zealand. The project accomplished its subsequent goal of investigating the role of housing in a care leavers' transition to independence, and how youth prioritise accommodation within their transition journey overall.

By creating an opportunity for care leavers to describe, record, and reflect on their preferred housing options through democratic participatory action methods of photovoice and photo-elicitation, the researcher implemented a project that empowered participants to speak plainly and authoritatively about their specific housing needs. Research on this topic has not previously been conducted in the New Zealand context, and this study adds a critical narrative to the current, but limited commentary on youth housing needs for care leavers.

Findings revealed a range of needs and preferences all relating to housing which cannot be viewed in isolation. They provide the basis for an argument to create a suite of supports constituting a comprehensive package of care, each part of which is vital. In summary, youth wanted housing stability through permanent accommodation options and support tailored to their individual needs.

While subtle differences emerged, there is common ground amongst the majority of participants on the following: the need for tailored housing suitable to each young person and their circumstances, and a desire for housing in rural and close-to-nature locations, often with a connection to cultural roots. Participants also called for individual housing options separated from their peers, the right to decide where and with whom they lived, and practical training for independent living.

Most of the themes revealed in this study mirrored those of international reports on housing needs for care leavers. These themes include the importance of youth participation in decision-making, training for independence, permanent and multiple housing options specifically designed for youth, and tailored supports ideally in the form of a transition workforce (Stein & Morris, 2010).

The desire for rural placements connecting youth to their cultural ancestry, and a unanimous call for independent housing options, were distinct from the findings in international studies cited in the literature review. Rural placements are not viewed as a preferable option in other jurisdictions due to the lack of housing supply and limited youth employment and education opportunities in rural environments (Mcghee, 2015). Yet in the context of this research, the cultural connections to land and ancestry linked to rural placements emerged strongly in the data, as discussed in Chapter Five. Connecting to whakapapa and whenua, with the opportunity to return to their tribal roots, was prioritised among rangatahi Māori.

Because none of the participants had experienced housing in an independent setting, an analysis of the benefits and limits of independent housing placements compared with family placements and supported accommodation options was not possible. This means further studies are necessary within the New Zealand context to produce definitive arguments in support of the creation and expansion of independent housing for care leavers. In this regard, it must be noted that independent living programmes have been shown to offer specific benefits to youth in other nations, especially in the United States (Lemon et al., 2005).

Of notable significance is that young people sought stability as their highest priority for any housing placement. This finding signals participants' sincere intentions to end a pattern of movement in the care system and make a fresh start. The data evidenced a connection between frequent, sudden, and unstable movements in care, and subsequent housing instability (after care). Experiences of participants' post-care housing instability included frequent and uncertain stints in temporary shelter with young people bouncing from one housing placement to the next. Similar connections between in-care and post-care housing instability are evidenced in Stein and Morris (2010) work in the UK, which found that frequent movements in the care system could negatively affect a care leaver's ability to sustain housing after exiting care.

The connections between care movements and post-care housing instability are alarming when considering that by the age of eight, New Zealand children in care have been moved an average of seven times (Duff, 2018). With housing instability normalised in the childhoods of many care leavers, it is not surprising that its prevalence in their lives extends

beyond care and into adulthood. What is surprising is the lack of investment in post-care housing which would respond to these risks.

The lack of permanent housing options for care leavers was exposed in the research with a number of participants recalling placements in short-term accommodation including caravan parks, boarding houses, and motel dwellings; environments unfit for youth, and temporary in nature. Without having the means and support to find ontological security to foster constancy and continuity in their lives (Johnson et al., 2010), the care leavers were at an acute risk of homelessness.

Fifty percent of participants had experienced episodic homelessness within the first two years since leaving care. This suggests an urgent need to resource and implement additional housing options for youth. The rate of homelessness recounted by youth in this research was higher than comparable studies cited in the literature review, which showed 20% of UK care leavers (Kilkenny, 2012) and 11-36% of US care leavers experience homelessness within that same timeframe (Fryar et al., 2017). While the New Zealand figure is alarming, it is also noted that the sample size of this particular study is too small to ascertain the experiences of New Zealand care leavers as a whole.

A key finding of this project, which aligns with international research, is that housing stability cannot be achieved by housing alone. To be stable, youth need support to transition successfully out of care. Despite recent investments by Oranga Tamariki into a transition workforce for care leavers (The Transition Support Service), which includes a commitment of five years of support, participants from this study recalled stories of neglect and abandonment from government soon after they exited care. As a result, the youth were critical of the role of government agencies in their housing journeys, and voiced feelings of hurt and disillusionment in relation to the people and systems that were put in place to support them.

It remains unclear why this group of care leavers failed to receive consistent and tailored support from Oranga Tamariki, and whether this is a wider trend amongst care leavers nationally. In light of the findings from this research, a potential disconnect between Oranga Tamariki policy about care leaver support and its implementation requires urgent review.

The desire for more intensive social worker supports was articulated strongly by youth in each interview, with a particular interest in establishing peer support workers with lived experience in care themselves. A peer support workforce does not exist in the New Zealand context for care leavers and is worth considering within the mix of transition support service improvements in the near future.

6.2   Strategic Implications and Practical Contribution

A key implication emerging from the project included the value of applying democratic methods like photovoice in research projects with hard-to-reach groups.

Drawing on the methods of photovoice and photo-elicitation enabled the researcher to uphold his strengths-based youth development principles throughout the data collection process and in every interaction with each participant. The inclusion of the visual method of photovoice offered participants a unique opportunity to be collaborators in the data collection process, and produced images with meaning for youth to draw on. This assisted them to respond with enthusiasm and authenticity during the semi-structured interviews. Further use of participatory methods such as photovoice could benefit similar youth projects in the future, especially when a researcher is seeking to apply strengths-based practice, build quality connections and relationships, and enable full participation (New Zealand Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002).

The next key contribution from the research established the importance of exploring potential housing options separate from their family of origin, while strengthening and deepening family connections after they left care. For most participants, their past family of origin relationships were characterised by difficulty and tension. The lack of resolution of these relational difficulties had a major bearing on the reluctance of participants to be housed with their families post care. This outcome raises some serious considerations for current practice within Oranga Tamariki.

The experience of youth in this study mirrors that of their international peers whose upbringings are too often shaped significantly by issues of poverty, violence, substance abuse, and mental health distress (Mendes, 2011). Participants who were discharged directly into family accommodation placements in this New Zealand study encountered immediate conflicts and difficulties, and left their family environments shortly afterwards. The quick

succession of movement out of care into family environments, and then into temporary accommodation, resulted in prolonged periods of unstable housing and homelessness.

Despite their personal reservations, some youth were open to being placed with family provided their family of origin could receive further support and assistance before the discharging of the care leaver into their care. This poignantly raises the immediate need for greater family supports across the care system as a whole.

Within this reluctance to return to their family of origin, participants did seek opportunities to reconnect with their cultural roots and establish relationships with their wider whānau, hapū, and iwi. Importantly, the research raised a possible connection between the desire from rangatahi Māori for housing in rural and natural settings with attempts to address broader and deeper cultural dislocation, impacted by colonisation. As the role of housing for Māori cannot be separated from a connection to whenua and whakapapa (Rout et al., 2019), these two issues need to be considered together. It may be that when participants were voicing a need to move closer to their ancestral lands, and into more rural settings, a deeper theme was emerging, identifying unmet and unsupported cultural needs beyond the topic of housing alone (Thistle, 2017).

Finally, the emphasis and appeal of independent accommodation separate from others was identified as critically important to participants, especially those whose accommodation histories were littered with post-care stories of family and peer conflicts resulting in unstable housing and episodic homelessness. While a diverse range of housing programmes are offered in other countries, including independent living options, New Zealand remains limited to only one model, that being supported accommodation. New Zealand care leavers would benefit from more investigation into the potential for a second, independent model being introduced as an alternative housing option to supported accommodation. Care leavers may also benefit from a small adaption to the current supported accommodation model; one where they are given more choice on who their flatmates might be. The current supported accommodation models operating in New Zealand do not provide care leavers with these choices.

6.3   Limitations of the Research

The researcher acknowledges that the project was restricted by several limitations which need to be considered when evaluating its findings. Some of these limitations were within the research design, while others emerged as the project progressed.

The geographical catchment of the sample was limited to Auckland City. While it is fair to assume that some of the experiences of the participants would apply across geographical lines, this project by no means reflects a national story for New Zealand care leavers and must be read with its regional context in mind. Still, by recruiting and interviewing ten care leavers between the ages of 18 and 22 and capturing significant feedback from rangatahi Māori (70% of the sample), the research cohort is a fairly representative sample of care leavers in New Zealand. Therefore, its findings could contribute to decision-making at a national level.

Although the researcher was able to recruit ten participants into the project (the high end of the initial goal of 6-10 participants), eight were female and two were male. The researcher made every effort to recruit a sample with an even gender mix, but this goal proved too difficult to accomplish, especially with the unprecedented challenge of Covid-19 restrictions. As a result, the gender balance heavily favours a female view. Further research with male care leavers could reveal more gender-specific needs. In the case of this research, gender specific needs emerged amongst young mothers who desired safe and secure stand-alone housing for their children (and for themselves), as described in Chapter Four. No such gender specific needs were identified for the male participants.

Importantly, none of the participants had any post-care housing experience in a rural setting prior to being interviewed. Yet, the desire for a stronger connection to nature and rural placements close to cultural lands and extended whānau rated highly. However, the lack of housing experiences in rural locations within the sample raises caution about attempting to provide rural housing options for care leavers until further research on this topic has been commissioned and evaluated. Any future research evaluating rural and urban housing placements for care leavers needs to include a cultural lens and a sample with housing experience in both urban and rural localities.

The lack of previous New Zealand research on the housing needs of care leavers limited the researcher's ability to analyse and critique his findings in relation to a larger body of evidence on the subject. The research cited within this thesis from the New Zealand context can be used to draw only a partial picture of the housing needs and housing experiences of young people after they have left care, and cannot be seen as comprehensive in any respect.

Because 70% of the sample identified as Māori, some significant cultural questions and implications emerged from the research. First, the care leavers' reluctance to be housed with their immediate family after care raises important questions about the addition of alternative post-care housing options for care leavers, while also placing the spotlight on how whānau and their tamariki are connected and supported throughout the care journey. Second, the potential link between a desire for housing in rural settings evokes deeper themes of cultural dislocation. The Te Ara Tika Māori Ethical Framework informed the research, grounding interactions with participants on its four principles of Whakapapa (relationships), Tika (research design), Maanakitanga (cultural and social responsibility), and Mana (justice and equity) (Hudson, 2010). The cultural implications raised and reviewed in the discussion section are limited due to the researcher being Pākehā, and should be read with this point in mind.

The researcher received cultural supervision from Fred Astle, Director of Kaupapa Māori at the University of Auckland's Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences. This supervision began with input on research design and included regular consultations throughout the project. The engagement strategies employed by the researcher to recruit rangatahi Māori were based on Fred's recommendations. Such advice included following tikanga within the interview settings, offering Māori participants the chance to introduce themselves with their pepeha, and providing kai with a small koha as an acknowledgement of their mana and contribution to the work.

It was crucial to include rangatahi Māori in the research because Māori are over-represented in the care system and have experienced significant cultural neglect during their care and transition out of care experience. Therefore, a sample without Māori participants would misrepresent the needs of the care leaver cohort and fail to acknowledge the past failures of the care system for rangatahi Māori, and the importance of culturally-informed housing responses for rangatahi Māori.

6.4 Future Opportunities

Looking ahead towards potential areas of further study reveals several opportunities following on from the findings of this research. In the immediate future, New Zealand would benefit from a larger, longer, and more in-depth investigation into culturally-led housing responses for Māori leaving care. Rangatahi Māori raised the importance of housing options within wider whānau, hapū, and iwi settings, and on tribal lands that could reconnect them to their whakapapa. There is an argument for researchers and practitioners to innovate and explore possibilities for more housing programmes led by Māori and embedded in a kaupapa Māori model of practice. Considering the obligations within Section 7AA of the Oranga Tamariki Act (1989) which includes goals to protect Māori rights and interests, uphold the mana (dignity, respect) of Māori in the care system, and increase equity for Māori in care (Oranga Tamariki, 2020), Māori led housing programmes for care leavers must feature in any future housing developments. Without them, the goals of 7AA would be difficult, if not impossible, to realise.

Throughout this project, the researcher continually struggled with the simple lack of attention and development given to housing the transition cohort from Oranga Tamariki, and the lack of robust housing policy to support the challenges youth face as they leave care. Housing needs for care leavers, specifically, are currently omitted in the legislation and need to come to the attention of decision-makers immediately. While Section 386AAC within the Act seeks to establish the principles to guide Oranga Tamariki when assisting a young person to achieve independent living, it falls short of naming and prioritising housing in the transition journey, and therefore leaves care leavers vulnerable to housing instability beyond care (Oranga Tamariki Act, 1989).

The researcher urges policymakers to review this section of the legislation and commission an investigation into the current housing needs and challenges faced by care leavers in New Zealand. Considering the prevalence of unstable housing environments immediately after care, the investigation needs to include a collection of destination data, so that care leavers' housing journeys can be more fully understood. Such data is available in other jurisdictions but is not collected in New Zealand at this time.

The qualitative findings in this research paint a concerning and alarming picture of housing instability for care leavers, but they present a partial picture only. The absence of knowledge within Oranga Tamariki and Ministry of Social Development about how many youth in motel accommodation arrive there with care histories is negligent. Without recording the housing outcomes of youth leaving care and collecting the necessary evidence on their living circumstances after being discharged, youth advocates and housing providers will continue to struggle to gain any real traction on comprehensive housing support for care leavers nationally. Tragically, under those circumstances, the young people themselves will continue to face the grave realities of unstable and unsafe living circumstances.

The researcher began this journey hoping to discover new models of youth housing through the literature review of programmes in other jurisdictions and responses from the participants themselves. Independent living programmes (ILPs) did emerge as a model of housing support needing more investigation and consideration in the New Zealand context. The participants were adamant that individual housing options needed to be introduced alongside supported accommodation to offer more youth housing options that are more suitable to their individual needs and circumstances. Despite ILPs' success in other countries, there remains no working model in New Zealand to compare with the current congregate housing offerings.

Decision-makers would benefit from further investigation of the ILP model and other independent living models by resourcing local pilot programmes that could be evaluated against the outcomes currently achieved in the contrasting supported living model; a model which also requires further research and an evaluation of its effectiveness in the New Zealand context. It would also be beneficial for further research to be commissioned with a larger sample of care leavers on the pros and cons of supported accommodation, and the appetite amongst care leavers for more individualised housing models.

THE LAST WORD

You know the hardest thing for me is seeing all these youth my age going through the same shit over and over again… I am praying every day that I make it out, that I make it big so I can like help change this world... But it's all about opportunities ah. I am trying to grab every opportunity that I can. - Crystal

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GLOSSARY

Acronyms

MSD	Ministry of Social Development
WINZ	Work and Income, New Zealand
OT	Oranga Tamariki – Ministry of Children
TSS	Transition Support Service
OIA	Official Information Application
YDSA	Youth Development Strategy of Aotearoa
PAR	Participatory Action Research
ILP	Independent Living Programme
EH SNG	Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NZ	New Zealand
US	United States
UK	United Kingdom
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Māori words

Whānau	Extended family, family group, a familiar term of address to a number of people - the primary economic unit of traditional Māori society. In the modern context the term is sometimes used to include friends who may not have any kinship ties to other members.
Hapū	Kinship group, clan, tribe, subtribe - section of a large kinship group and the primary political unit in traditional Māori society. It consists of a number of whānau sharing descent from a common ancestor, usually being named after the ancestor, but sometimes from an important event in the group's history. A number of related hapū usually shared adjacent territories forming a looser tribal federation iwi.
Iwi	Extended kinship group, tribe, nation, people, nationality, race - often refers to a large group of people descended from a common ancestor and associated with a distinct territory.
Whakapapa	Genealogy, genealogical table, lineage, descent - reciting whakapapa was, and is, an important skill and reflects the importance of genealogies in Māori society in terms of leadership, land and fishing rights, kinship and status.
Māoritanga	Māori culture, Māori practices and beliefs, Māoriness, Māori way of life.
Marae	Courtyard – the open area of the wharenui, where formal greetings and discussions take place. Often also used to include the complex of buildings around the marae.
Aotearoa	Used as the Māori name for New Zealand.
Wāhine	Female, women, feminine.
Tāne	Husband, male, man.
Tamariki	Children - normally used only in the plural.
Tamaiti	Child, boy – used only in the singular

Taitamariki	Youth, teenagers, young person (of either sex), adolescent.
Rangatahi	Younger generation, youth.
Pākehā	New Zealander of European descent
Tangata Whenua	Local people, hosts, indigenous people - people born of the whenua, i.e. of the placenta and of the land where the people's ancestors have lived and where their placenta are buried.
Whenua	Land
Tipuna	Ancestors, grandparents
Kaitiaki	Trustee, minder, guard, custodian, guardian, caregiver, keeper, steward.
Manaakitanga	Hospitality, kindness, generosity, support - the process of showing respect, generosity and care for others.
Tikanga	Correct procedure, custom, habit, lore, method, manner, rule, way, code, meaning, plan, practice, convention, protocol - the customary system of values and practices that have developed over time and are deeply embedded in the social context.
Tika	Truth, correctness, directness, justice, fairness, righteousness, right
Kanohi-ke-te-kanohi	Face to face, in person, in the flesh.
Tūpatu	To be cautious, careful, wary, suspicious, alert, vigilant
Whakaaro	Thought, opinion, plan, understanding, idea, intention, gift, conscience.
Whiriwhiri	To discuss, decide, consider, negotiate.
Haere	To go, depart, travel, walk, continue, come
Mana	Prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, charisma
Mana Tangata	Power and status accrued through one's leadership talents, human rights, mana of people.
Whakarangatira	To ennoble, treat with dignity, honour, revere, venerate.
Tūrangawaewae	Domicile, standing, place where one has the right to stand - place where one has rights of residence and belonging through kinship and whakapapa.
Wetewete	To untie, unravel, release, set free.
Tūkino	Destruction, ill-treatment, abuse, torture, cruelty.
Pōhara	To be poor, poverty-stricken, broke, hard up, destitute, impoverished.
Mokemoke	Loneliness, solitude, isolation.
Papatūānuku	Earth Mother
Koha	Gift, present, offering, donation, contribution.
Pepeha	Tribal saying, tribal motto, proverb (especially about a tribe), set form of words, formulaic expression, saying of the ancestors, figure of speech, motto, slogan - set sayings known for their economy of words and metaphor and encapsulating many Māori values and human characteristics.

Definitions retrieved from Te Aka Māori Dictionary, https://maoridictionary.co.nz/

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Oranga Tamariki Official Information Application

22 September 2020

Mr Brook Turner
brook.turnernz@gmail.com

Tēnā koe Mr Turner

Thank you for your email of 30 August 2020 to Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki), requesting the following information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act):

- *How many care leavers in transition are currently housed in temporary accommodation such as Motels through MSD support or Transitional Housing Placements?*
- *How many care leavers in Transition are currently registered with permanent housing placements.*
- *How many transition beds, units does Oranga Tamariki currently have (August 2020).*
- *How many care leavers are due to transition out of care giving circumstances over the next 12 months?*
- *I am also interested to understand how many care leavers have been given prison sentences in the last 24 months (August 2018- August 2020).*

The Oranga Tamariki Transition Support Service was established on 1 July 2019 to help the more than 600 eligible young people who leave Oranga Tamariki care and custody every year. The Transition Support Service has been designed in collaboration with care-experienced young people, using insights gathered through a co-design process. Young people who leave our care, or a youth justice placement, face some big challenges and Oranga Tamariki is committed to ensuring they have the same opportunities in life as every other young New Zealander.

As at 31 July 2020, 756 young people were actively working with a Transition Support Worker. Transition Support workers support young people by connecting them with their identity, culture, whānau and wider support networks; help young people make and achieve goals; assist in navigating services available to young people; and teach valuable life skills. Currently, Oranga Tamariki has partnered

with 50 community and iwi providers across New Zealand and has employed nearly 80 full time equivalent Transition Support Workers.

I will now respond to each of your questions in turn.

- *How many care leavers in transition are currently housed in temporary accommodation such as Motels through MSD support or Transitional Housing Placements?*

Please note that we do not record information on how many care leavers are receiving support from MSD to be housed in temporary accommodation such as Motels. However, the Transition Support Service has established 59 supported accommodation placements. These placements are consistently at capacity. Supported accommodation is supplied by community providers so young people can:
- increase their knowledge and skills on how to live independently (e.g. managing a tenancy, cooking, housekeeping)
- get opportunities to try, test and learn in a safe environment
- set goals and identify skills they need to develop or build on.

As we continue to grow the Transition Support Service, we are working towards a target of 228 Supported Accommodation placements, in total, by the end of the 2023 financial year.

- *How many care leavers in Transition are currently registered with permanent housing placements.*

Oranga Tamariki does not collect or hold information on young people who have left care and are registered with permanent housing placements. Therefore; this part of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the Act, as the information requested does not exist.

- *How many transition beds, units does Oranga Tamariki currently have (August 2020).*

Please see our response to question one.

- *How many care leavers are due to transition out of care giving circumstances over the next 12 months?*

There are currently 340 young people aged 17 years old in Oranga Tamariki care, including those in Youth Justice residences, who will transition out of our care this financial year. Additionally, some young people, aged 15 years and over, will also transition out of our care. Using data collected from the 2020 financial year, which showed that an additional 180 young people aged 15 years and over transitioned out of care, we anticipate that around 520 young people will be leaving care and transitioning to adulthood in the 2021 financial year.

- *I am also interested to understand how many care leavers have been given prison sentences in the last 24 months (August 2018- August 2020).*

Oranga Tamariki does not collect or hold information on young people who have left care and have gone on to be given prison sentences. Accordingly, we are declining this part of your request under section 18(g) of the Act, as we do not hold the information and I have no grounds to believe that the information is held by another department, Minister of the Crown or local authority.

Oranga Tamariki intends to make the information contained in this letter available to the wider public shortly. We will do this by publishing this on our website. Your personal details will be deleted and we will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@ot.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with this response, you have the right to ask an Ombudsman to review this decision. Information about this is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or by contacting them on 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā

Steve Groom
General Manager Public, Ministerial and Executive Services

Appendix B: Organisational Consent Information form

My name is Brook Turner. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Applied Practice – Social Practice degree at Unitec New Zealand and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a thesis course which forms a substantial part of this degree.

Research Project Title: Self-Determined Housing Choices for Young People Leaving Care in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The aim of my project is: To gain insights from youth leaving care on their preferred housing and accommodation options. Currently, little is known about young people's views on housing as they exit care. This research will enable you as a child welfare agency to refer young people currently engaged in your service to participate in research that gives them a voice into housing options for youth leaving care in the future. Firstly, with your permission I will meet with a designated person from your organisation to discuss the project, ethics of the recruitment process and the general terms of participation as a contributing organisation. Then I will work with the organisation and its key workers to recruit young people who fit the scope of the research. This will be a range of young people aged 18 -25 willing to voice their opinion on housing by sharing their experiences, hopes and aspirations for accommodation options after care. All young people approached for opportunity to participate must maintain their choice to decline the offer.

My research will take youth views seriously and listen in a way that builds youth voices into a body of work to influence those in decision-making positions. Before the interview, I will meet each young person who has been recruited for participation in the project and invite them to participate in a photovoice activity to help visualise their housing needs and aspirations. The photos will help to inform me on their housing needs and desires. I will support each young person with information to complete this activity, provided the young person is also supported by their key worker to conduct the activity. Immediately following the photovoice activity, I will meet with each participant enabling them to present their photos and views on housing in a confidential setting. I will then ask a series of questions about their current and past "post care" accommodation experiences to gain further insights on their views on housing. The research will not name or identify any of the participants and all recordings and photographs will be stored in a password protected file on site at Unitec.

As a small acknowledgement of each participants contribution to the research, I, the researcher, will provide some food during the interview. I will also offer a $25 gift card to each participant as a small honorarium, recognising their support for the project.

Specific referral request conditions:
By consenting to refer young people to this research, I am requesting permission to name your agency as a contributing organisation to this body of work. This is not necessary and a negotiation to keep the organisation's name confidential can also be negotiated.

By committing to this research, I specifically request the presence of a key worker alongside each young person referred to the project. This ensures that each young person will have a key worker known to them always present during the project activities. This is a commitment of two-three hours. It will include:

A) Verbally inviting a young person to participate in the research, while respecting their right to decline the invitation. Written information explaining the information to the young person will be provided to you.
B) Accompanying the young person to an information session with the young person, where the project and photovoice activity will be explained.
C) Supporting and accompanying the young person to complete the photovoice activity
D) Accompanying the young person to the interview where they will discuss their photos and address questions about their views on housing.

About the researcher: I have twenty years of youth development experience. I am a qualified youth worker and hold graduate and post graduate qualifications involving non-profit and social service work. I have held the position of General Manager of Supportive Housing at Visionwest Community Trust, before being promoted into the executive management team. My understanding of youth development and social housing approaches position me well to undertake the research. I am available to answer any further questions you might have. My contact details are brook.turner@visionwest.org.nz or 0278085692.
If you are comfortable with the description and terms of the research above, please complete the organisational consent template below, and return to Brook Turner via email.

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 20201003
This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from *April 2020* to *December 2021*. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Unitec
Institute of Technology
TE WHARE WĀNANGA O WAIRAKA

Organisation logo/Masthead (please insert)

Date
Name:
Address:

Dear (*name of addressee*),
Re: Organisational Consent
I *(name) (position in organisation)* of *(organisation)* give consent for *Brook Turner* to undertake research with young people referred from this organisation as discussed and outlined with the researcher.
Our organisation commits to resourcing the young person referred by us with a key worker for the information briefing, photovoice activity and interview. We understand this is a commitment of approximately 2 hours of time and offer this voluntarily.
By signing this consent our organisation recognises the researcher will have the right to use their clients voice and opinion as a contribution to the final research
This consent is granted subject to the approval of a research ethics application in relation to this project (20201003*)* by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee and a copy of the application approval letter being forwarded to the organisation as soon as possible.

Name………………………………………………………….

Signature: ……………………………………………………

Date:………………………………………………………..

Appendix C: Participant Information Form

My name is Brook Turner. I am currently enrolled in the *Master of Applied Practice* – Social Practice degree at Unitec New Zealand and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a thesis course which forms a substantial part of this degree.

The aim of my project is: To gain insights from youth leaving care about their preferred housing and accommodation options. Currently, little is known about young people's views on housing as they exit care. This research will enable you as a young person to voice your opinion on your housing future by sharing your hopes and aspirations for accommodation options. The research will take your views seriously and listen in a way that builds your views into a voice of influence on those in decision-making positions.

I request your participation in the following way:

I will offer an opportunity for you to participate in two key activities. The first will be a photovoice activity. Photovoice is a method that helps young people to express themselves by photographing scenes and images that either literally or symbolically represent their views on specific subjects. In this case, you will be asked to take a series of photographs that represent your desired options for accommodation. To participate in this activity, you will be issued with a portable device and photovoice guide. I will brief you on the photovoice activity at an information session, ensuring you know and understand everything required for the activity. No prior photography experience is required. After the information session, you will complete the photovoice activity with the support of a key worker. It is expected to take one hour of your time.

The second activity will be an interview with myself and a key worker, immediately following the photovoice activity. For the interview, you will be asked to present four to five of your favourite images captured during the photovoice activity and describe what they represent to you personally in connection to housing. One image will be chosen to focus on in depth during the interview. The interviews will also include a few key questions from myself focused on your housing needs, views, and aspirations. During this interview I will also ask you about your current and past 'post-care' accommodation experiences to gain further insights from you in relation to your housing experience.

The information gathered from these two activities will become significant data/content, used to represent, and demonstrate your housing needs and aspirations. I will analyse the data before putting them into written form as part of a final research thesis. The thesis will then be used to inform key leaders who can make decisions on housing for youth leaving care in the future. Your participation will require about two hours of time: half an hour for the information session, one hour for the photovoice activity, and up to an hour for the interview with the researcher.

Once you have chosen and shared your photos, any additional photography will be erased. However, you will have the right to keep these images yourself for personal use. The photos chosen for the research will be kept in a secure, lockable location at Unitec and used only to demonstrate your views in the research described. After ten years this information will be destroyed. Only myself and my Unitec supervisors will have direct access to this information.

What it will mean for you:

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form. The consent will give me permission to use your chosen photos in my final thesis. The consent will also give me permission to record the interview with you in order to capture all your views in words for transcribing. Once your responses have been written up and photos have been arranged in draft form, you will be asked to review the content and will retain the right to ask for changes of any of the content. You will not need to give a reason for these changes. Signing the consent form does not stop you from changing your mind if you wish to withdraw from the project. However, because of our schedule, any withdrawals must be done within 2 weeks after you have received your interview transcript.

Visionwest Community Trust or a space at your referring agency facilities will be the location for the meetings between us. Visionwest is located at 95-97 Glendale Road, Glen Eden. The meeting will take place with a key worker present to support you and will be conducted in a confidential setting. If you have any questions for me about the research, you and/or your key worker can reach me (Brook Turner) on 027 8085692. I will be the main contact for you and your key worker regarding any involvement in this project.

Your name and information that may identify you will be kept completely confidential. All information collected from you will be stored on a password protected file and only you, the three researchers and our supervisors will have access to this information.

You will not be identified in the thesis. The results of the research activity ("raw data") will not be seen by any other person, including in your organisation, without the prior agreement of everyone involved.

I hope that you find this invitation to be of interest. If you have any queries about this research, you may contact my principal supervisor at Unitec New Zealand.

My supervisor is: Helen Gremillion phone: 815-4321 ext. 7510 or email: hgremillion@unitec.ac.nz

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 20201003
This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from *April 2020* to *December 2021*. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

Research Project Title: Self-Determined Housing Choices for Young People Leaving Care in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The aim of the research is to gain insights from youth leaving care on their preferred housing and accommodation options. Currently, little is known about young people's views on housing as they exit care. This research will enable you as a young person to voice your opinion on your housing future by sharing your hopes and aspirations for accommodation options. The research will take your views seriously and listen in a way that builds your views into a voice of influence to those in decision-making positions. Before the interview, I will meet you to invite you to participate in a photovoice activity to help visualise your housing needs and aspirations. The photos will help to inform me on your housing needs and aspirations. Then you and your key worker will participate in the photovoice activity before meeting with me to present the photos. I will also ask you a range of questions about your current and past 'post-care' accommodation experiences to gain further insights from you on your views on housing.

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understand the information sheet given to me.

I understand that I don't have to be part of this research project should I choose not to participate and may withdraw at any time prior to the completion of the research project. To withdraw from the research, I can contact my key worker or referring organisation via email, text or in person at any time up until two weeks after the interview. The organisation will then inform the researcher that I have withdrawn from the research. In that event, all information relating to my involvement will be deleted and will no longer be used or reported in the research.

I understand that everything I say is confidential and none of the information I give will identify me and that the only persons who will know what I have said will be the researcher and their two supervisors. I also understand that all the information that I give will be stored securely on a computer at Unitec for a period of 10 years.

I understand that my discussion with the researcher will be taped and transcribed into written form.

I understand that my chosen photos representing my preferred housing options will be published in this work and give consent for their use in this project.

I understand that I can see the finished research document.

I have had time to consider everything, and I give my consent to be a part of this project.

Participant Name: ………………………………………………………………….....

Participant Age: …………………………………………………………………………

Participant Signature: ……………………….. *Date:* ……………………………

Project Researcher: ……………………….. *Date:* ……………………………

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 20201003
This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from *April 2020* to *December 2021*. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix E: Key Worker Information Form

My name is Brook Turner. I am currently enrolled in the *Master of Applied Practice – Social Practice* degree at Unitec New Zealand and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a thesis course which forms a substantial part of this degree.

The aim of my project is: To gain insights from youth leaving care on their preferred housing and accommodation options. Currently, little is known about young people's views on housing as they exit care. This research will enable you to be a key support for a young person to voice their opinion on housing futures for care leavers. The research will require your participation in an information briefing, photovoice activity, and interview session, as agreed with your employer. For each component of the project, you will act as the key worker and support person for the youth participant. You will reserve the right to postpone or pause any participation of the young person in the research if you deem it risky for the young person at any time.

I request your participation in the following way:

I will offer an opportunity for you to support a young person in two key activities. The first will be a photovoice activity. Photovoice is a method that helps young people to express themselves by photographing scenes and images that either literally or symbolically represent their views on specific subjects. In this case, you will be asked to support a young person to take a series of photographs that represent their desired options for accommodation. To enable safe participation in this activity, you will be required to accompany the young person as they record images that represent their housing aspirations without me, the researcher, being present. This is to help empower the youth participant to record and describe their housing aspirations without any overt influence from the researcher. I will brief you on the photovoice activity alongside the participant, ensuring you know and understand everything required to support the young person during the activity. The activity is expected to take one hour of your time.

The second part of the interaction will be an interview with myself and the young person with you present as the key worker as a support person for the participant. During the interview, you will be asked to manage the participant's safety and rights. The researcher will work with you to mitigate any known risks for the participant before arriving at the interview. You will play a role in adjourning the interview if you deem it necessary and in the best interests of the participant. At which point a new interview time will be negotiated.

The information gathered from these two activities will become significant data/content, used to represent, and demonstrate the youth participant's housing needs and aspirations. I will analyse the data, before putting it into written form as part of a final research thesis. The thesis will then be used to inform key leaders who can make decisions on housing for youth leaving care in the future. Your participation will require about two hours of time: half an

hour for the information session, one hour for the photovoice activity, and up to an hour for the interview with the researcher.

What it will mean for you:

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form. The consent will give me permission to include you as a key worker and support for the participant referred by your employer (subject to the young person's personal wish to engage in the research).

A space at your organisation's facilities will be the location for the meetings between us. If not, we can arrange to have the interview at Visionwest Community Trust. Visionwest is located at 95-97 Glendale Road, Glen Eden. These meetings will both take place with you present to support the young person and will be in a confidential setting. If you have any questions for me about the research, you can reach me (Brook Turner) on 027 8085692. I will be the main contact for you regarding any involvement in this project.

Your name and information that may identify you will be kept completely confidential.

You will not be identified in the Thesis. The results of the research activity ('raw data') will not be seen by any other person in your organisation without the prior agreement of everyone involved.

I hope that you find this invitation to be of interest. If you have any queries about this research, you may contact my principal supervisor at Unitec New Zealand.

My supervisor is: Helen Gremillion phone: 815-4321 ext. 7510 or email: hgremillion@unitec.ac.nz

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Appendix F: Key Worker Consent Form

Research Project Title: Self-Determined Housing Choices for Young People Leaving Care in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The aim of the research is to gain insights from youth leaving care on their preferred housing and accommodation options. Currently, little is known about young people's views on housing as they exit care. This research will enable you to be a key support for a young person from your organisation to voice their opinion on youth housing options. The research will require your participation in an information briefing, photovoice activity, and interview session, as agreed with your employer. For each component of the project, you will act as the key worker and support person for the youth participant. You will reserve the right to postpone or pause any participation of the young person in the research if you deem it risky for the young person at any time.

Your involvement in the project will include:

A) Verbally inviting a young person to participate in the research, while respecting their right to decline the invitation. Written information explaining the information to the young person will be provided to you.
B) Accompanying the young person to an information session explaining the project and photovoice activity.
C) Supporting and accompanying the young person and researcher to complete the photovoice activity, ensuring ethical guidelines outlined in the participant information sheet are followed.
D) Accompanying the young person to the interview where they will discuss their photos and address questions about their views on housing.

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understand the information given to me.

I understand that I will be asked to invite a young person to participate in this research and must always respect their choice to decline involvement. I understand I will be required to accompany a young person during a photovoice activity without the researcher present and commit to supporting the young person to complete this activity within ethical parameters outlined in the participant information sheet.

I understand that my primary role in this research will be to support a young person participating in this project, and I will take responsibility for keeping the young person safe throughout the project.

I understand that all information (visual and written) obtained during this project is confidential and commit to keeping it confidential.

I understand that the identity of the young person interviewed in this project and supported by me will remain confidential in the final work and I have an obligation to always keep their identity in relation to this research project confidential.

I understand that all the information given will be stored securely on a computer at Unitec for a period of 10 years.

I understand that the discussion with the researcher will be taped and transcribed.

I understand that I can see the finished research document.

I have had time to consider everything, and I give my consent to be a part of this project.

Key Worker Name: ……………………………………………………………………....

Key Worker Signature: ……………………….... Date: ………………………….

Project Researcher: …………………………. Date: ………………………….

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Appendix G: Key Worker Confidentiality Agreement

Research Project Title: Self-Determined Housing Choices for Young People Leaving Care in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The aim of the research is to gain insights from youth leaving care on their preferred housing and accommodation options. Currently, little is known about young people's views on housing as they exit care. This research will enable you to be a key support for a young person to voice their opinion on housing futures for care leavers. The research will require your participation in an information briefing, photovoice activity, and interview session, as agreed with your employer. For each component of the project, you will act as the key worker and support person for the youth participant. You will reserve the right to postpone or pause any participation of the young person in the research if you deem it risky for the young person at any time.

Key Worker's Name:

Phone number:

Email:

I _____ *(full name - please print)*
Agree to treat in absolute confidence, all information that I become aware of while participation in the above research project. I agree to respect the privacy of those involved and will not divulge in any form, information regarding any participating person or institution and agree to not retain or copy any information involving the above project.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement and for any harm incurred by individuals or organisations involved, should information be disclosed.

Name……………………………………………….Signature………………………………

Date: …………………………………………

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Appendix H: Semi Structured Interview Questions

Man/Woman/Other
Age
Ethnicity
Referral Agency

Water and light refreshments will be available at each interview
Offer young person the option of cultural greeting – Mihi/ Pepeha

1: Qualitative Interview introduction

Length: 30-45 minutes

State that a primary goal is to see things the way youth see them. Explain that the conversation has a focus on youth experience, youth opinions, and what youth think and feel about the subject of housing and accommodation.

The interview is seeking responses to the key aims of the research below:
- To explore housing needs for care leavers and their self-determined views on the role of housing in their transition to independence.
- To understand how care leavers identify and prioritise housing in their journey, if at all.
- An opportunity to highlight important and critical support factors for youth as they navigate post-care accommodation in the New Zealand context.

Introduction to interview with young person and overview of the contents of the interview. 5mins

2: Verbal Consent

Would you like to take part in this interview?
Ensure each participant is comfortable with proceeding with the interview at this point of the process. 5mins

3: Post care housing experience background questions:

A) Can you describe your current or previous post-care housing experience(s) and how you view them in relationship to your housing needs?
B) Describe any key parts of your housing experience so far that you see as critical positive components of supporting your transition to independence?

C) Describe any key parts of your housing experience so far that you see as having limited or constrained your transition to independence?

4: Photovoice Activity questions:

Each participant will have the opportunity to present four to five images from their photovoice experience and speak to their importance in representing their housing needs/hopes and aspirations.

A) Please describe how each image represents your housing needs and/or desires.
B) Please describe how the photovoice activity enabled and/or restricted you in presenting your housing aspirations.
C) From the photovoice activity, are there any insights you have gained that could inform the types of housing on offer for youth leaving care in the future?

5: Photo-elicitation Question

Each participant will have the opportunity to give a more in-depth perspective on one of their images, and how it relates to their desired housing experience.

A) Choose one of your images that best represents your needs and desires for housing and explain why (Photo-elicitation question).
B) What are the most important elements or messages in this image?
C) How can this image help people to make better decisions for housing solutions for young people leaving care?

6: Youth Housing Choice Questions:

Each participant will have the opportunity to describe their views on housing needs for youth leaving care.

A) Do you have any suggestions around what youth housing options for youth leaving care could or should look like in the future?
B) In your view, are there any critical components or supportive elements of youth housing programmes that must be present, regardless of the housing type offered? If so, what are they and why do you think they were critical?
C) How important is housing in your journey, and what role do you see housing playing in your life, to support with your transition to independence?
D) If you had the power to make changes to the current youth housing approach, what changes would you make and why?

7: Explanation of next steps

The researcher will explain what happens to the content from the interview and will give the participant an indication of how the content will be anonymised in the final work.

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Appendix I: Photovoice Guide

What is photovoice?

Photovoice is a tool or method developed to enable participants to visualise, reflect and explore their views on a subject being researched. Using photovoice can support individuals to visualise and demonstrate their views in a creative way that draws on their emotions around and experiences of the particular topic.

How does it work in practice?

Participants attend an information session where the topic for the research is discussed. They are then supplied with a photography device and information on how to use it. Participants are encouraged to capture a few images that represent the theme chosen for the photovoice activity. It is expected that the volume of images originally captured will be between 10-15 images.

Each image is intended to represent the participant's views on the topic chosen and their feelings about the topic. Once the images have been collected, a limited number (four to five) are selected by the participant. Participants write short explanations of each chosen image before presenting them in a discussion with the researcher. The images can be printed or digitally displayed at this meeting. The discussion focuses on why the photos were chosen, what makes them significant and what the participants think about each image. The discussion is recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

Theme for this photovoice activity:

For this research participants are asked to take literal or symbolic photographs of images that represent their housing needs and aspirations. The focus is on capturing images that reflect the housing and accommodation needs for participants as they leave care and seek independent living. The images can be objects, people, abstract or symbolic. The photos are used as a creative and visual medium to assist the young person in describing their needs and aspirations for housing. Image choice is totally determined by each participant and the process is 100% participant led.

Empowerment:

Participants of photovoice are empowered to take the photographs and interpret what they mean for the researcher. This enables the researcher to get an honest and non-biased view from the participant on the topic.

Photovoice activity challenge:

- Take time to think about what kinds of images you would like to capture to represent your housing needs and aspirations.
- Write a list of image ideas
- No photographing of strangers and/or images that immediately identify an address or location such as letterbox numbers, or images with car number plates in view are permitted in this exercise
- No objectional images are permitted in this exercise, and profane images will not be accepted
- Schedule a time to take photos with support from your key worker
- Choose four to five images you like best and write captions for each on how they represent your housing needs and aspirations
- Before writing the captions, think about how each image makes you feel and how this connects with what you are hoping for in future housing experiences
- Select your favourite image and write a more in-depth explanation of how this image represents your views more than any other
- Have fun!!!

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