

Staying On

A guide for carers and young people
about access to Staying On



Acknowledgments

We acknowledge all the Elders, foster and family carers, residential care programs, biological families and young people who have so generously and courageously contributed their learned and lived expertise in the design and development of Home Stretch WA's Staying On approach.

We acknowledge Aboriginal people as the Traditional Custodians of this land and pay our respects to their strength, cultural resilience and their Elders past and present.

This guide was originally produced by Anglicare WA for Home Stretch WA as part of the Home Stretch WA Community of Practice.

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Introduction

The Staying On guide has been developed to help young people and their family or foster carers understand one element of the Home Stretch WA service offer: the opportunity for a young person to be financially supported to 'Stay On' with a carer between the ages of 18 and 21.

Home Stretch WA provides a range of resources and supports for young people who decide to engage in the program.

This guide provides information about what Staying On is and how it works. It answers frequently asked questions to help people decide whether Staying On might work for them.

For more information about Staying On, you can speak with staff at your local Department of Communities district office or visit the Home Stretch WA webpage at www.communities.wa.gov.au/homestretchwa.



**The Staying On Agreement
allowed me to feel more like
one of the family and like I have
a place to be after turning 18.**

Young person in Home Stretch WA



What is Staying On?

Staying On gives young people and their family or foster carers the opportunity to be supported to continue a living arrangement up until the age of 21.

For young people, it means they do not have to leave their carer's home until they reach 21, though they may leave sooner if they are ready to move on.

For Staying On carers, it means they can be financially supported to have the young person stay with them until they turn 21 years old.

Many young people have already been staying on when it has been in the young person's interest and the carer and young person wanted it to happen. The Staying On approach is about supporting this arrangement to be successful.

Quick Facts

- Financial support is provided towards the living arrangement for a young person until they turn 21.
- A Staying On Agreement must be made between the young person and carer.
- A Staying On Subsidy is paid to the carer, with an agreed co-contribution from the young person.

Is Staying On a good option for you and your carer?

Staying On needs to be a choice that is made between the young person and their carer.

Conversations about leaving care and plans for housing can be worrying for some young people, so it is important that the benefits and changes Staying On might bring are safely and respectfully explored between the carer and young person.

For many people, it is about making sure that each person's expectations are clear, and a plan is created to make it work. For others it might mean creating some 'house rules' for how things need to work.

Every Staying On arrangement is different, but all involve support to create a Staying On Agreement (see page 10 for more information).

Sometimes Staying On may not be possible or the right choice. The young person must always be supported to understand all their options to decide on the one that best fits their situation.

Does the carer receive a payment?

Yes, the Staying On carer receives a regular payment for as long as the young person is participating in Home Stretch and is living with them (until they turn 21).

The Staying On Subsidy is different to a foster care subsidy. The expectation is the young person pays for some of their personal costs and may contribute to household costs. This is because from the age of 18 the young person is on an independent income, either through employment or income support payments from Centrelink (such as Youth Allowance).

Part of working out the Staying On Agreement is figuring out together how much the young person pays to support the living arrangement.



Why is a young person expected to contribute to costs?

Home Stretch WA was developed on the idea of supporting and empowering young people to take charge of and responsibility for their own lives. This means young people are asked to invest in themselves – building their skills, knowledge and capacity.

While the Staying On Subsidy provides some financial support to the carer, the goal is to prepare young people to be able to manage their finances and budget for their own housing costs in the future.

Asking young adults to 'chip in' towards costs is also consistent with expert parenting advice given to parents with adult children living at home.

How is the Staying On Subsidy paid?

The Staying On Subsidy is provided to support some of the costs of a young person to continue living with the carer. The subsidy is paid by the Department of Communities to the carer on a fortnightly basis.

The rate is reviewed and reduced every 12 months. In the second year, the Staying On Subsidy is reduced to 75% of the first-year base rate amount, and in the third year it is reduced to 50%.

The expectation is the Staying On Subsidy decreases and the young person's contribution increases. This helps the young person prepare for paying for their own housing costs in the future.

Example:

Chris is 17 ½ years old and has been living with his carer, Aunt Laura, since he was 12. Chris is currently receiving the independent rate of Youth Allowance as he is in the care of the Department of Communities' Chief Executive Officer and is living in a foster care placement. Chris does not contribute towards any household costs.

The Home Stretch WA provider Transition Coach works with Chris and Laura to develop a Staying On Agreement prior to Chris turning 18. The Transition Coach, Chris and Laura look at what Chris can contribute to the living arrangement over the next 12 months and come to an agreement.

Chris has never had to think about paying for housing costs before and gets help from the Transition Coach to create a budget. Together they work out what he can afford to contribute as part of the Staying On Agreement. They work out he can start by contributing towards the family internet bill (\$15 per week) and pay for his own phone credit (\$30 per week). Chris is also going to continue to pay for personal costs such as outings with friends, fashion clothing items and discretionary expenses.

When Chris turns 19, he has a part time job. Chris offers to pay \$60 per week towards household costs and continues to pay towards the family internet bill. He pays his own personal bills, but the subsidy helps to cover some household costs.

Before Chris turns 20, he starts working full time and decides to move out with his partner. They find a place together and apply for the Home Stretch WA 'Housing Allowance' to help make the shared housing affordable.

The Staying On Subsidy payments stop when Chris moves out.

What does the subsidy provide for?

The subsidy is a payment made directly to the carer to support the young person to continue living with them up to the age of 21. It's not a payment to increase or supplement a young person's income.

The subsidy is paid to help ensure the young person's basic needs can be met, and to support the family to be able to continue to provide a home for the young person.

Though every home is different, it is generally expected the subsidy covers things like:

- food
- accommodation (in the home)
- utility bills including Wi-Fi.

It might be used to pay for other things on occasion, but that is decided each time between the young person and their Staying On carer.

Where it is agreed as part of the Staying On Agreement, the subsidy might cover things like:

- transport costs
- family outings/entertainment
- incidental expenses related to education, training or employment
- haircuts
- personal health items such as contraceptive products or hygiene items
- gym or recreation memberships
- basic clothing items.



What does the young person pay for?

By the time the young person reaches the age of 18, they should have a form of income such as Youth Allowance (independent rate), Disability Support Pension or employment.

If the young person does not have any income, relevant Services Australia (Centrelink) support payments need to be applied for. It is important that the young person is responsible for paying their own costs and contributing, or 'chipping in', to the living arrangement.

Chipping in is about a young person investing in themselves and building their skills, knowledge and capacity. Though every situation is different, it is generally expected the young person pays for things like:

- fashion clothing items and shoes
- fuel in their own car
- transport costs
- personal outings such as festivals, concerts or movies with friends
- personal styling products
- video games
- phone credit
- food for the house/takeaway.

Chipping in doesn't always have to be financial; it could be helping with the chores or learning how much the bills are every month, so the young person is ready when they move out.



How long can a young person Stay On for?

The length of time a young person can Stay On is agreed by the young person and carer. Generally, a Staying On Agreement covers more than a few months.

The Staying On Subsidy is paid while the young person remains living in the arrangement (until they reach age 21). Ending the agreement is a decision that either the young person or carer can make at any time. If the young person and carer decide to continue the living arrangement after 21, that is entirely up to them, but the subsidy payments will cease.

How is this different from a foster placement?

When a young person turns 18, two significant things happen:

1. The young person's care order ceases, and the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Communities is no longer their legal guardian.
2. The young person is legally an adult. The young person no longer has a caseworker, and most supports provided by the Department of Communities end.

The young person is eligible for income support payments from Centrelink to help with study, undertake training or look for work. The Department of Communities has a responsibility to support eligible young people who have left care after the age of 15 and are less than 25 years old, to access a range of services and supports.

As an adult, the young person can legally purchase alcohol, gamble, get married and apply for financial credit. Additionally, any matters relating to the justice system would be dealt with through the adult legal system.

The payment helps. It covers the household bills and living costs, she also contributes to costs so it works well.

Carer in Home Stretch WA



The difference between foster care and Staying On

Foster Care

The young person is in State care and is under 18 years old.

The young person has been placed in a foster care arrangement.

A young person's care plan sets out their care needs and how they are going to be supported in the foster care arrangement.

The Department of Communities is the young person's guardian and the main support.

The Department of Communities pays a subsidy to the carer (foster care subsidy) for the care of the young person and assists with other costs.

A foster carer receives additional money to assist the young person in care to cover other expenses such as clothing and education costs not covered by the subsidy.

The young person does not need a Working with Children Check.

Staying On

The young person is an adult (over 18) and has left care.

The young person continues living with the carer under a Staying On Agreement.

The young person and carer create a Staying On Agreement with the help of a Home Stretch WA worker and agree on how things should work.

The Department of Communities is no longer the guardian for the young person, and they no longer have a caseworker. However, they can access support from the Department until they turn 25.

The young person has an income and contributes to the costs of Staying On. The Department of Communities helps by paying a Staying On Subsidy to the Staying On carer.

As the young person has left care, they are responsible for their expenses. They will have support from the Home Stretch WA Transition Coach and can access Invest in Me funding for certain expenses.

The young person may need a Working with Children Check if the Staying On carer is fostering other children.

What arrangements are covered by Staying On?

It is important the young person makes the decision to Stay On.

A Staying On arrangement can only be made in cases where a young person stays on with a foster or family carer who has been approved by the Department of Communities or an endorsed foster care agency.

The carer must agree to the plan for the young person to Stay On, and it must not be against the young person's wishes or against their best interests to remain there.



What about other care arrangements?

A young person who is not living with a carer under a Staying On Agreement can be supported by their Home Stretch WA provider to access a Housing Allowance payment that will assist them to afford a broader range of living arrangements. To create equity with those under a Staying On Agreement, the maximum rate of Housing Allowance payment per fortnight is the same as for the Staying On Subsidy.

The Housing Allowance can be used to support a young person to live in shared housing, or to set up boarding or lodging living arrangements with a relative or friend or in a host home. The fortnightly Housing Allowance amount is individually negotiated with each young person and paid directly to their landlord.

What is a Staying On Agreement?

A Staying On Agreement (agreement) is important to ensure everyone is clear about how things work when a young person continues to Stay On with their carer after they turn 18. The agreement helps set out how things are going to work for the young person and carer. It is not a care plan, but an agreement between the young person and carer.

The agreement works out any house rules and expectations of living together, and how the young person will contribute to the house now that they are an adult. In some cases, when the young person and carer have been living together for a long time, issues like coming home on time, having friends over or staying away overnight may have been sorted out. So, the agreement may not need much detail.

In other cases, there may be some real concerns about things like safety, and so there may need to be a discussion and agreement about how many nights the young person can spend outside of the home and whether the police are contacted if the young person goes missing.

A Staying On Agreement needs to be in place, regardless of how long the young person has been living in the care arrangement.

What is decided in a Staying On Agreement?

Every Staying On Agreement is different. The Home Stretch WA Transition Coach will help ensure the Staying On Agreement makes sense to the young person and carer.

Some issues that may come up:

- Does the young person need to let the carer know if they are staying out and who they will be with?
- How does having a partner or friends staying overnight work?
- Does there need to be an agreement about the carer going into the young person's room?
- Can the young person drink or smoke in the house?
- What expectations are there about cleaning and household chores?
- What happens if the carer goes away for a month?
- Is the young person going to have a house key? If not, why not? What needs to happen for it to be agreed?
- What happens if there is an emergency after hours?

What if things go wrong or the Agreement doesn't work?

A vital part of Staying On working well is ensuring the young person and carer feel safe to communicate how things are going with each other, and work through any problems.

That means they can ask for the Staying On Agreement to be reviewed.

The young person can ask the Transition Coach for help to figure out how to deal with any problems that arise and work out how to make things right. The carer can contact the Transition Coach if they have any concerns about how things are going.

If it is not working out, the young person is supported by the Transition Coach to explore housing options to better fit their needs.

Moving out doesn't mean the carer and young person's relationship must end, though the carer will no longer be paid the Staying On Subsidy.

The Staying On journey

Awareness

Find out more about Staying On

Make an agreement

Work out a Staying On Agreement

Application

Apply for the Staying On Subsidy

Payment

Receive the Staying On Subsidy

Review

Review how things are going

Exit

Staying On finishes when the young person turns 21 or decides to move on

AWARENESS Finding out about Staying On

This usually starts 6 months before you turn 18

Identify young people



The case worker/s identify young people in stable and safe living arrangements who are leaving care in the next 6 months.

Find out about Home Stretch WA



The case worker discusses Home Stretch WA with the young person and carer.

Check out: Home Stretch WA Fact Sheet for Young People

Helps you make a decision about Staying On

Meet with a Transition Coach



The young person and carer will meet with the Home Stretch WA Transition Coach.

Discussion



The Transition Coach explains Home Stretch WA and the option to be supported to Stay On. Information is given and how Staying On Agreements work.

MAKING AN AGREEMENT Working out how Staying On works for you

If you agree to Stay On, let's do some planning

Decision to Stay On



The young person and carer agree the young person can 'Stay On' in the living arrangement.

Smooth transition of supports



The Staying On Facilitator works with the carer's support circle to smoothly transition support to Home Stretch WA. Where relevant, they agree on how things might work to support a carer with other children in the living arrangement.

Prepare Agreement



The young person and carer are supported to negotiate a Staying On Agreement. The Home Stretch WA Staying On Facilitator assists with the process.

Staying On Agreement



The young person and carer are supported to negotiate a Staying On Agreement. The Home Stretch WA Staying On Facilitator assists with the process.

We can help you make an agreement

APPLICATION Applying for the Staying On Subsidy

With the agreement done, now you can apply for the subsidy

Subsidy application



The Transition Coach helps the young person and carer submit the subsidy application paperwork for approval.

Subsidy approval



The carer and young person receive a call/email/SMS notification when the Staying On Subsidy is approved.

PAYMENT Getting paid

Let's check to make sure you are getting paid and things are OK

Subsidy payment



Once approved (from age 18) the carer receives fortnightly Staying On Subsidy payments and the young person makes their agreed contribution.

REVIEW Your first review

4-Week review



The young person and carer meet with the Staying On Facilitator and Transition Coach to check in and tweak the agreement as required.

REVIEW Ongoing to make sure things are still OK, report changes, review the agreement and subsidy

We keep in contact and provide support when needed

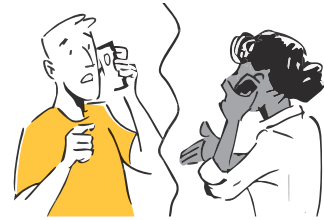
Check in (ongoing)



The young person meets with the Transition Coach monthly to report any changes and to offer more intensive support to the young person as required.

The Staying On Facilitator checks in every 3 months or as agreed with the carer.

Report changes



The young person lets the Transition Coach know if things change, and the carer can call the Staying On Facilitator to let them know how things are going.

We review your agreement and subsidy each year

Agreement review



If things change, the young person or carer can ask to review the agreement. If it's time to move on, the Transition Coach can help the young person with housing options.

Subsidy review



The young person and carer meet with the Staying On Facilitator and Transition Coach to review the subsidy agreement 3 months before it ends. They check the long-term plan and make sure the family is prepared for the reduced payment.

EXIT Young person turns 21 or decides to move on

We start planning early so you have time

Final review



When the young person turns 20, the young person and carer meet with the Staying On Facilitator and Transition Coach to work out what will happen from age 21.

Moving on



The subsidy payment ends at 21 and the young person follows their housing pathway. There is an opportunity to celebrate and reflect on the Staying On period.

Staying On finishes when you turn 21 or move on



How do I get more information about Staying On?

For more information about Staying On and setting up an agreement, speak with your Department of Communities case worker or other District Office staff, or check out the Home Stretch WA webpage:

www.communities.wa.gov.au/homestretchwa

