



Home Stretch WA

Information for Special Guardians

About Home Stretch WA

The Department of Communities' Home Stretch WA program provides young people leaving out-of-home care in Western Australia with the option to receive a range of supports and resources from age 18 until they reach 21 to help them transition to interdependent adulthood.

Home Stretch WA is delivered through service providers – currently comprised of three Community Service Organisations and 10 Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations – across the State. The program is voluntary (opt-in) and gives young people access to one-on-one mentoring and support from a transition coach to help them towards achieving their goals and aspirations.

The Home Stretch WA transition coach will focus on supporting young people to:

- obtain stable and safe accommodation
- explore education, training and employment opportunities
- develop and maintain a longer-term support network (support circles)
- access health and other services
- develop their life skills.

Young people will also have access to a financial safety net which includes Invest in Me funding to help them achieve their goals and support any current needs, and a fortnightly Staying on Subsidy or Housing Allowance payment to support their accommodation arrangement.

Eligibility for young people on special guardianship orders

Young people who transitioned from a protection order (time limited or until 18) to a protection order (special guardianship) after they reached 15 years are eligible for Home Stretch WA and qualify for leaving care assistance (under section 96 of the *Children and Community Services Act 2004*).

Young people who were placed on a Special Guardianship Order before they turned 15 years old are not eligible for leaving care assistance or the Home Stretch WA program due to not meeting legislation requirements under section 96 of the *Children and Community Services Act 2004*.

How young people can access Home Stretch WA

A young person can be referred to a Home Stretch WA service provider by a Department of Communities Child Protection and Family Support District Office once they turn 17 and up until they reach the age of 20 years and nine months. If unsure, the young person can contact the Home Stretch Project team (HomeStretchReferrals@communities.wa.gov.au) or the Special Guardianship Order Support team SGOSupportTeam@communities.wa.gov.au to find a suitable Department of Communities Child Protection and Family Support District team member to work with them to complete a referral. However, the young person must provide consent (agree to hear from a Transition Coach about Home Stretch WA) to the Stage 1 referral.

Once the young person turns 17.5 years, and if the Home Stretch WA service provider has capacity, they will be offered the opportunity to attend a Stage 2 information session with their preferred Home Stretch WA service provider to find out more about the program and decide for themselves if they want to participate. Special Guardians and trusted supports can also attend if the young person requests this.

Young people with disability

Young people with a disability are eligible for Home Stretch WA; however, they must have the ability to understand what Home Stretch WA is, the role of the transition coach and the minimum level of engagement required to participate in the program.

The level of engagement will be dependent on a young person's circumstances. It would typically include a check-in with the young person on a weekly or monthly basis. The level of contact and support would be negotiated to meet the needs of the young person.

Provisions will be made by the transition coach for young people to have a support person in attendance at the Home Stretch WA information session to assist them in making an informed choice about their participation and engagement in the program.

Staying On Subsidy

Many young people continue to 'stay on' with a carer or Special Guardian when they leave out-of-home care at 18 years of age when the carer or Special Guardian and young person agree that this is a suitable arrangement.

Information about Home Stretch WA will be given to the young person and their Special Guardian as part of the leaving care planning process, which commences at 15 years of age. This will provide the opportunity to discuss Home Stretch WA and obtain the young person's and Special Guardian's views about the option of staying on. If this information has not been shared at the time a SGO is made, post age 15, this can be obtained from the District, SGO team or Home Stretch team.

A Staying on Subsidy can be applied for a young person with a Special Guardian if the Special Guardian was/is a registered carer (Departmental or other). If a young person decides to participate in Home Stretch WA, they will have access to a Staying on Subsidy which will help them remain supported while they continue living with their Special

Guardian once they turn 18, up until the age of 21, though they may leave this arrangement prior to the age of 21 if they choose to.

The Special Guardian (referred to as a supportive adult) will be paid a fortnightly Staying on Subsidy to cover some of the young person's accommodation costs. There will be an agreed co-contribution from the young person towards the costs from their income (from work or a Centrelink payment) and/or by helping with other negotiated tasks (housework, cooking).

Staying on needs to be a choice that is made between the young person as an adult and their supportive adult. An important part of this process is the development of a Staying on Agreement (agreement) to ensure everyone is clear about how things will work now that the young person is no longer under a Special Guardianship order and is legally an adult. The agreement will also include how much the young person will contribute towards the accommodation costs.

The Staying on Subsidy can only commence and be paid to the supportive adult when a young person has onboarded with a Home Stretch WA service provider, and the agreement and application have been submitted by the Home Stretch WA service provider and has been approved by the Department of Communities.

The transition coach and Home Stretch WA Staying on Facilitator (SOF) will assist the young person and supportive adult to negotiate the agreement and will meet with them again in approximately four weeks to check how everything is going and adjust the agreement if required. The transition coach will continue to check with the young person on how things are going and if any changes need to be made to the agreement. The SOF will also check-in with the supportive adult every three months (or as agreed). The SOF can provide support to the supportive adult as required.

An annual review meeting will also occur with the young person and supportive adult to see how the living arrangement is going and if any changes need to be made to the agreement.

The Home Stretch WA service provider needs to be advised if the agreement is not working and/or if the young person moves out of the living arrangement.

The Staying on Subsidy will continue to be paid to the supportive adult¹ while the young person is participating in the program and remains in the living arrangement (until they reach 21 years of age).

Housing Allowance

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.

¹ The Year 1 fortnightly subsidy payment rate will reduce in Year 2 and again in Year 3, and the young person's contributions towards costs will increase. This helps the young person become more independent and prepare for their future housing costs.

The Housing Allowance can be used to support a young person to live in shared housing, or to setup boarding or lodging living arrangements with a relative, friend or in a host home. The fortnightly Housing Allowance amount is individually negotiated with each young person and paid directly to their landlord or supportive adult¹.

A young person on a Special Guardianship Order, who is living with a supportive adult who is not a registered foster carer, may apply for a Housing Allowance under a Host Home arrangement. The application requires a completed application form, a Living Together Agreement, and a photo or screenshot of a bank statement. The Housing Allowance is payable at the same rate as the Staying On subsidy. However, the Housing Allowance is treated as taxable income, which may affect the supportive adult's tax obligations, Centrelink payments, and income-related concessions, rebates, or levies.

Demand for Home Stretch WA

There is high demand for Home Stretch WA in some areas, which may mean there is a delay to when a young person is allocated a transition coach and when they can start participating in the program, should they choose.

Any queries regarding a young person's referral to a Home Stretch WA service provider and/or allocation of a transition coach can be made to the Department of Communities via email to HomeStretchReferrals@communities.wa.gov.au.

General enquiries can be sent to the email address outlined below.

More information

- **Visit our website:** www.communities.wa.gov.au/homestretchwa
- **Email:** HomeStretchWA@communities.wa.gov.au