

Where Reintegration Is Not An Option:

Post-Care Housing for Youths Who Age Out of Care in Singapore

An Evaluation of Children's Aid Society (CAS) Housing Programme

Introduction

In Singapore, around 500 children and youths are in out-of-home residential care. Each year, around 30 are unable to reintegrate with their families and age out of care independently. This transition period can be fraught with challenges. In particular, these care leavers face extremely limited housing options.

In 2022, Children's Aid Society (CAS) piloted Thrive21+ to support care leavers' transition into independent living. It includes a Housing Programme (HP) component where participants rent an apartment together and co-pay living expenses for two years with the support of social workers.

This evaluation of the HP was conducted by Quantedge Foundation (Singapore) in collaboration with CAS.

Study Objectives



Highlight housing challenges faced by care leavers ageing out independently



Understand how the HP has influenced the residents who have aged out of care



Synthesise learnings from the implementation of the HP to inform potential policy enhancements

Methodology



10 residents of CAS's residential home (4 in the HP, 6 non-HP) completed a survey on:

- Care leavers' housing needs and aspirations
- Concerns about and experiences with transitioning out of care
- How the HP has affected participants



Independent Living Skills Assessment Tool was used to understand:

- Changes in care leavers' attainment of life skills at pre- and mid-programme stages
- Comparisons between HP and non-HP participants



5 CAS staff members were interviewed to:

- Build an understanding of the local housing landscape and options available to care leavers
- Surface preliminary insights from running the HP
- Share their perspectives on the challenges care leavers face

Challenges faced by Care Leavers

Education and Income Profiles



Education:

- Most participants have **ITE-level educational attainment**
- 6 are still studying, all in ITE
- Of the 4 no longer in school, 1 holds a Polytechnic Diploma; the rest have post-secondary (non-tertiary) qualifications

Income:

- **8 in 10 participants are earning money**, including allowances from National Service
- **Mean amount: \$1,137 | Median amount: \$800**

Housing Options and Aspirations



Limited Options:

- **Current policies restrict options available for single young adults like care leavers**
- Without family support, they must turn to private rental market, which is often **unaffordable** without financial aid
- Public Rental Scheme is heavily subsidised, but youths do not meet the age criterion

Aspiration vs. Reality

- Survey reveals **a gap between participants' ideal housing option and their confidence in achieving it**, with **lack of financial resources** cited as a barrier
- Knowledge of the housing landscape is low

Financial Concerns



Biggest Worry:

- Half cited **money-related worries** as their top concern about ageing out independently
- Transitioning from having most of their daily expenses (e.g. shelter, food) taken care of to fully support themselves

Education vs. Work Trade-off:

- Staff observed that **financial worries often drives youths to prioritise income over furthering their studies**, raising concerns about their longer-term financial trajectory
- Unlike peers with strong family support, care leavers do not have a safety net to fall back on

Emotional and Social Challenges



Emotional Impact:

- Some participants expressed worries about **coping without a support network**
- Moving out into the community was initially **socially isolating** for HP participants

Learning Curve:

- Independent living tested social skills in **resolving conflicts, sharing responsibilities and adapting to different living habits**
- Staff observed that some children in institutionalised care struggle with interpersonal communication, complicating the experience of living with housemates

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Impact of Housing Programme

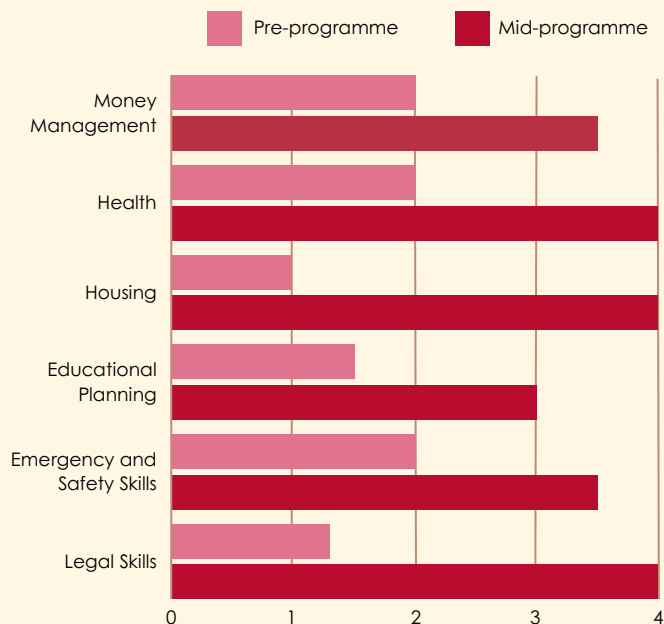


Chart 1: Life skills categories where there was at least 1.5 difference in mean score pre- and mid-programme

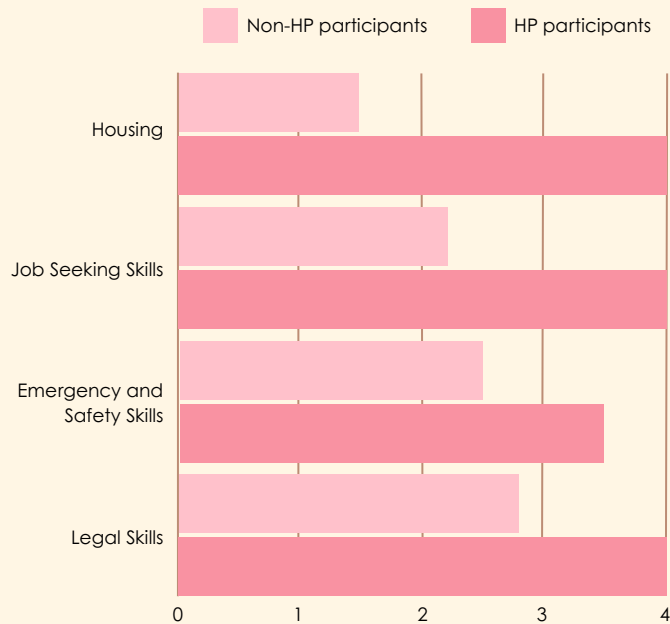


Chart 2: Life skills categories where there was at least 1.0 difference in mean score between HP participants and non-HP participants

The evaluation found notable improvements in the attainment of critical life skills. HP participants showed improvements in **14 out of 15 categories** by the mid-programme period.

Participant and Staff Perspectives

The Housing Programme also fostered bonds, provided stability and enabled the pursuit of personal interests.

“

(Housing Programme) gave me a **stable environment** ... I'm exposed to realities **without having to take a large risk**, because (CAS) is still supporting us ... if it's too much for you, they'll be there.

HP participant

“

Without housing, this is something that he may not be willing to try out. I think other residents may try cooking and he realised that you (can) have interest in these things ... **Identifying your own personal interests and hobbies** is something that has developed for them.

Staff interviewee

“

(One resident) has really grown to **care for the other boys** ... they have learned to **rely on one another for support**.

Staff interviewee

Conclusion and Recommendations

Key determinants to successful transition to independent living:



Recommendations:

- Introduce year-long pre-discharge preparation programme for care leavers
- Facilitate access to public rental housing
- Partner private landlords to ensure care leavers are given a chance to rent
- Ensure financial assistance quantum is adequate for independent living
- Provide supplementary grant to support care leavers' personal development and aspirations
- Provide individualised support and guidance that focuses on building of care leavers' social capital