Where to go?
A qualitative longitudinal study of the transition out of State care in Ireland

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The Problem

State care can be residential, foster, and/or kinship care. While experiences vary across different types of care, numerous poor outcomes are generally associated with having a care history. For example, people with a history of care are more likely to experience:

HigherUnemployment
PublicAssistance
MentalHealthProblems
EarlyParenthood
SocialExclusion
AlcoholUse
Homelessness
DrugUse
PhysicalHealthProblems
LowerEducationalAttainment

However, research demonstrates the critical importance of supports in improving care leavers' outcomes. These supports can be in the form of:

Transportation
HealthCare
SocialSupport
HousingAssistance
Mentoring
EmploymentServices
Education

Policy tends to focus on more measurable outcomes (e.g. employment, education and housing status) despite growing evidence that social support may in fact be the most important in terms of achieving future positive outcomes.
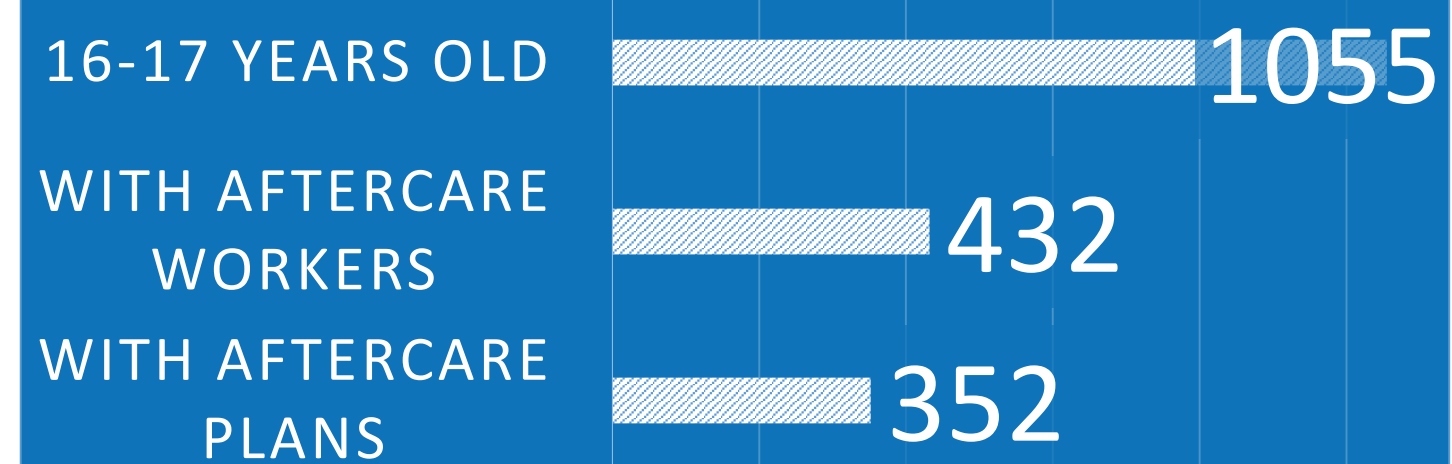
Irish Context

6258

children in care aged <1-17 years

1880

young people, 18-25, receiving aftercare

(Tusla, December 2016)

CHILDREN IN CARE

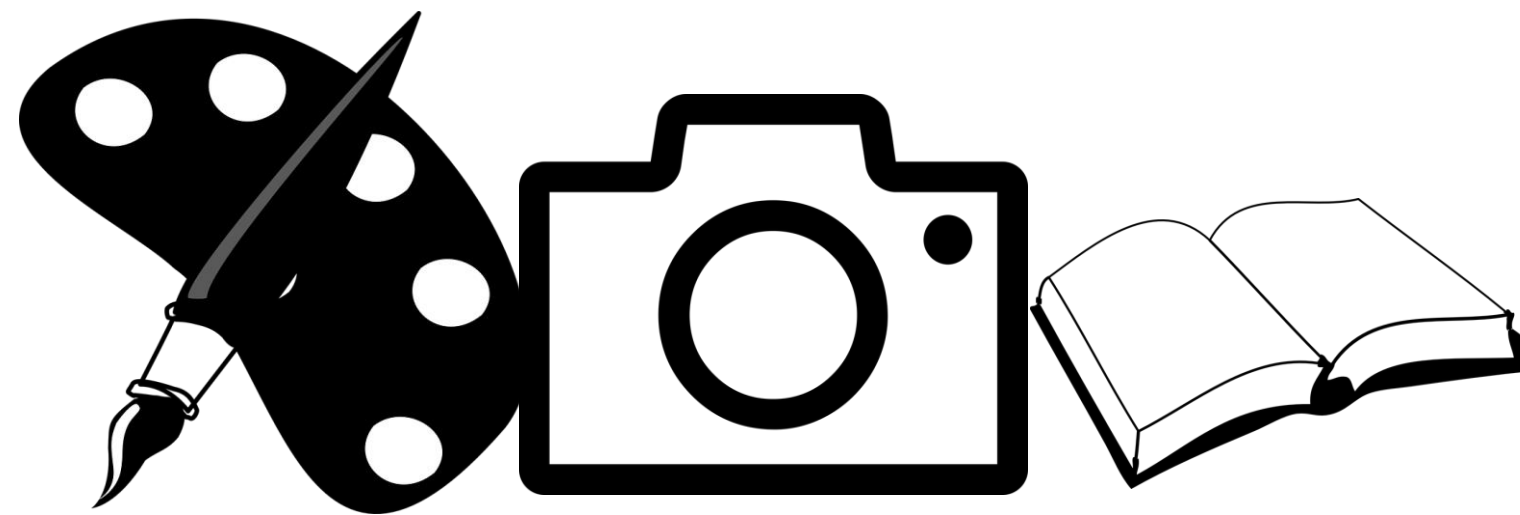|	
16-17 YEARS OLD	1055
WITH AFTERCARE WORKERS	432
WITH AFTERCARE PLANS	352

The Current Study

is a Grounded Theory investigation of leaving care as a process with 3 aspects:

- Longitudinal Tracking
- Creative Documentation of Experience
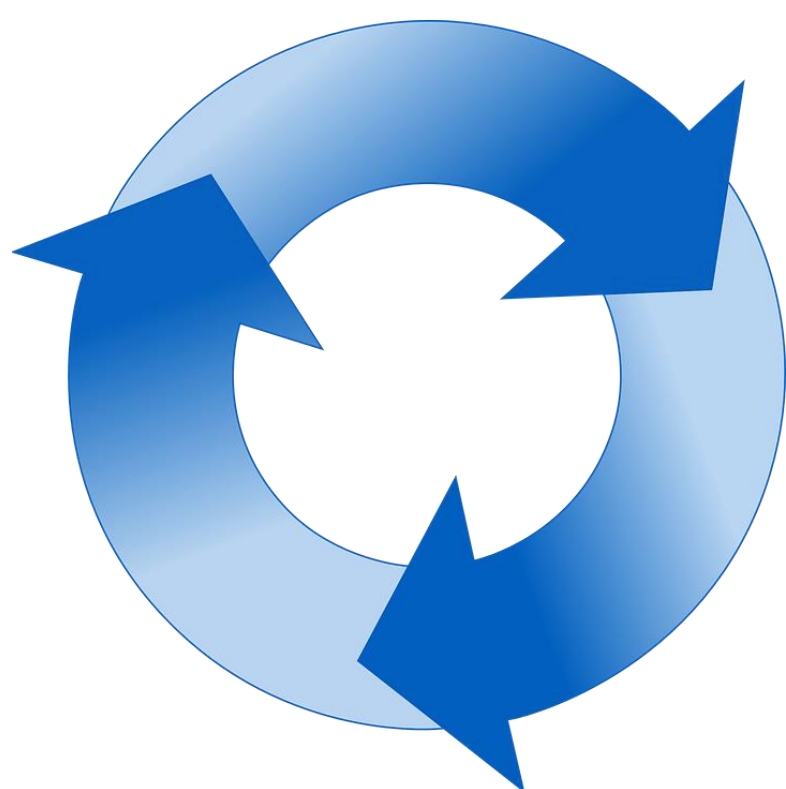- In-depth Interviews

Research Question

- What shapes the transition out of State care in Ireland for young people turning age 18?

Understanding Leaving Care as a Process

A longitudinal approach allows for exploration of themes and tracking changes in experiences over time.

Young people will be 'tracked' over a 12-month period and re-interviewed twice at 6-month intervals.

0   6   12
months

Methods

Using a mix of participatory methods permits triangulation of data and has been shown to improve engagement and retention, allowing them to 'own' a part of the process.

They have the choice to:
- Journal,
- Create Art,
- Send Photographs,
- Bring an object with meaning to meeting.

All participants will complete in-depth interviews designed to understand their experiences over time.

Sampling

Young people with the following criteria:
- any gender
- left care in the previous 12 months
- spent at least 6 months prior to their 18th birthday in State care
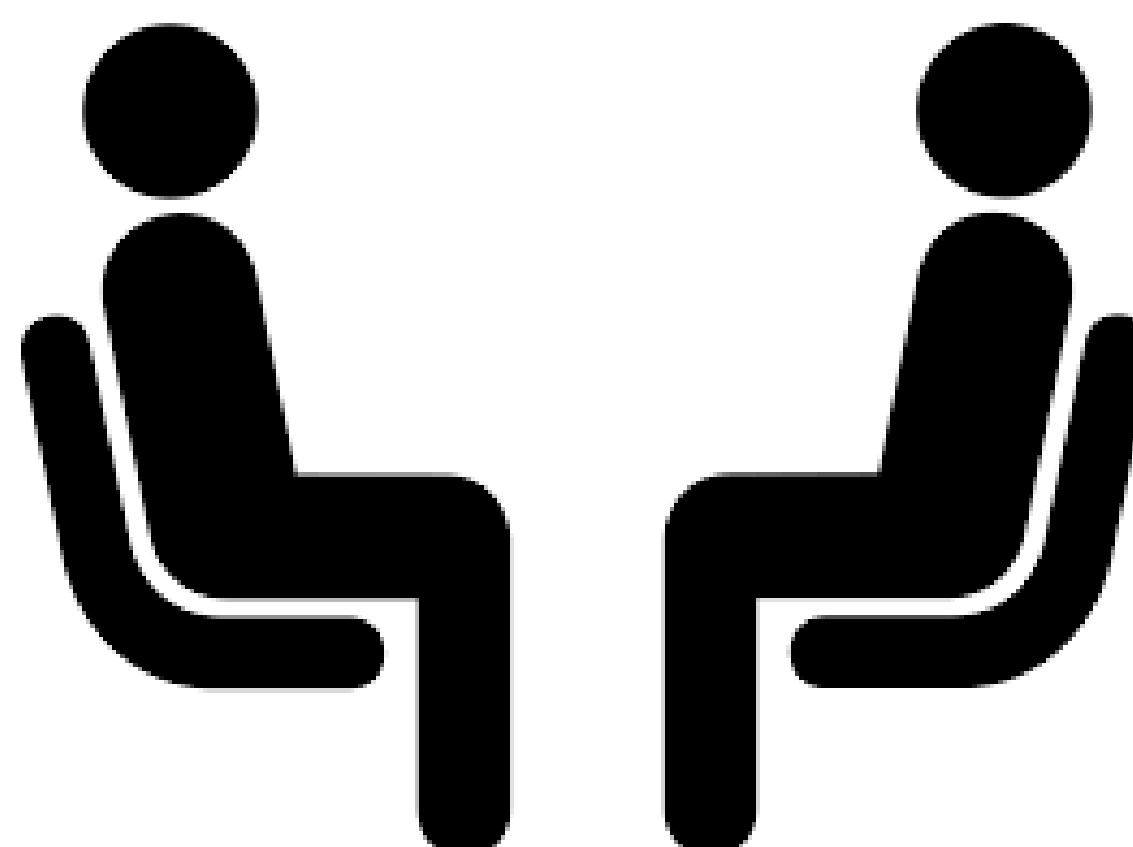
Initial Results

- 5 interviews completed
  - 2 female
  - 3 male
- Emerging concepts:
  - Boundaries and control
  - From overprotection to instant adulthood
  - The "Real World" vs. Care

Challenges

- Heavy reliance on gatekeepers
- Young people commonly disengage from services at 18 and return 1-2 years later

Feedback

on methodology, especially relating to youth engagement, retention, and empowerment is welcomed.