



**Life after Care: Perspectives on CAS
for Care Leavers Model of Care provided
by Peter McVerry Trust**

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The views expressed in this report are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of The Housing Agency.

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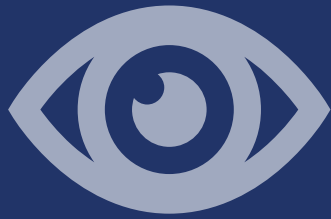
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Our Vision, Mission, and Aims



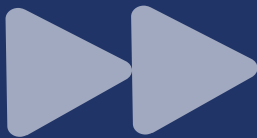
Vision

An Ireland that supports all those on the margins and upholds their rights to full inclusion in society.



Mission

Peter McVerry Trust is committed to reducing homelessness, the harm caused by substance misuse and social disadvantage. Peter McVerry Trust provides low-threshold entry services, primarily to younger people and vulnerable adults with complex needs and offers pathways out of homelessness based on the principles of the Housing First model.



Aims

To target those most marginalised in society and offer a safe and supportive environment through our service provision.
To treat participants with warmth and respect and actively encourage them to be involved in all aspects of their own support plan.

To offer a comprehensive prevention package of support in order to reduce the likelihood of homelessness to those leaving care, those leaving treatment, those leaving prison or other institutions and those whose accommodation is vulnerable.

To offer a comprehensive package of support that will provide the best opportunity possible for and assist them in planning a pathway out of homelessness or drug use, or if they continue to use drugs, to assist them towards some level of stabilisation in order to live a life of dignity, with respect and opportunity.
To assist each person to re-establish himself or herself in the community and move towards greater independence.

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The CAS housing officers employed by PMVT, for their assistance throughout the entire duration of the project. Their perspectives proved to be invaluable in gaining a greater understanding of the complexities involved in providing care and support for youth in CAS properties.

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All PMVT managers and directors including Directors of Services and Heads of Services for their participation in the focus group. Their expert knowledge of the organisational factors involved in the CAS for Care Leavers support provided a greater sense of how the model is embedded within PMVT.

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List of Abbreviations

AHB	Approved Housing Body
CAS	Capital Assistance Scheme
DCC	Dublin City Council
FEANTSA	European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless
FCC	Fingal County Council
HAP	Housing Assistance Payment
HWS	Housing with Supports
HOS	Head of Services
IPS	Individual Placement Supports
KCC	Kildare County Council
LA	Local Authority
PMVT	Peter McVerry Trust Organisation
SDCC	South Dublin City Council
STA	Short-Term Accommodation
TUSLA	The Government Child and Family Agency
WCC	Westmeath County Council

Executive Summary

In the past decade youth homelessness has seen a notable rise, prompting increased global awareness and the necessity for action. As young individuals find themselves without stable accommodation, they encounter a myriad of challenges including access to supports, unemployment and disrupted education. Navigating the transition from State care to independent housing often represents a precarious journey for many youths, placing them at higher risk of housing insecurity and homelessness. The Irish Government has built on the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) in order to support housing needs for individuals with experiences of State care.

The present study aimed to investigate the experiences of youth living in CAS-funded properties, the support available to them, as well as challenges in providing long-term support and tenancy sustainment. The study is focused on the CAS for Care Leavers model of care provided by Peter McVerry Trust (PMVT), a national housing and homeless charity committed to reducing homelessness and the harm caused by substance misuse and social disadvantage. To explore the impact of PMVT's CAS for Care Leavers model of care, the study incorporated the experiences of youth living in the CAS for Care Leaver properties, as well as the perspectives of PMVT staff members as service providers. In total 11 semi-structured interviews with young people aged between 18 to 25 accommodated in PMVT-supported properties and 3 focus groups with 9 PMVT professionals including frontline staff, management, and directors of the organisation were conducted.

Key Findings of the Study

Youth voices

Pathways to CAS

All youth demonstrated a history of unstable living, including experiences of homelessness, prior to moving into CAS funded properties. The pathways into these properties were multi-faceted and strongly associated with the efficacy of their Tusla-allocated aftercare workers. The commencement of residing in the property was also shown to be an overwhelming experience, where youth expressed feeling lonely and isolated in the first few months.

Life is CAS

Once settled into the property, the youth praised the high quality and fully furnished accommodation provided. Youth also described feeling a sense of ownership, security, and belonging attributed to the stability of their tenancy. The satisfaction with the location of properties was also discussed and most youth valued the accessibility to amenities and having a pre-existing relationship with the community. Rental rates were linked to individual income and were considered to be fair and accessible. Furthermore, a wide range of support provided by PMVT staff members was highlighted including:

- a) Administrative and property maintenance
- b) Assistance with managing isolation and loneliness
- c) Engaging with community resources, particularly with educational courses and health services

The young individuals felt confident seeking assistance when necessary and trusted in the competence of their CAS housing officer. Over time, youth developed strong relationships with their CAS housing officer, who adapted the frequency and methods of contact to align with each of the individual's needs. Some youth also benefited from additional wraparound support from a network of staff across different PMVT services. These services provided practical and emotional assistance, enhancing youth's sense of security and supporting further independence.

PMVT Staff Perspectives

Model of Care

As the transition into a CAS property is a significant change for any youth, this period is recognised by staff as a potential period of heightened vulnerability. As a result, PMVT operates an innovative 'Turn the Key' concept where a fully furnished and stocked property is provided from the moment youth are handed the keys to the property.

PMVT also provide support in setting up bank accounts, utility bills, and budgeting. By providing this service from the first day in a new tenancy, it is believed to support tenancy sustainment for youth leaving State care.

In addition, PMVT offer access and engagement to all youth from a variety of support workers in different specialties. All staff apply a trauma-informed and participant-led approach to safeguard the well-being of the participants and ensure long-term tenancy sustainment.



Supporting youth

The targeted support involved initial assistance during the placement period, access to multi-disciplinary teams, where a strong emphasis was placed on a continuum of care and wraparound support including:

- a) Initial placement support – mitigation of the logistical and financial barriers to independent living when transitioning into new properties.
- b) Facilitating the role of a landlord – managing rental payments, and supporting property maintenance.
- c) Facilitating engagement with physical and mental health services; and aiding access community resources, including employment and education opportunities.

The main challenges identified by staff members were:

- a) Shortage of staff
- b) Limited infrastructure across geographical regions

Both challenges are emphasised as having negative effects on staff workloads, resulting in a decrease in available time to interact with youth. In addition, further enhancement in supporting youth engage in education and employment programs were identified as areas for potential growth.

Key Recommendations

Building on the findings from youth and staff, the central focus of the recommendations revolves around the following:

- Further development of the Turn the Key Concept with a greater focus on establishing fully furnished and stocked homes prior to youth moving into the properties.
- In order to provide clarity and consistency for youth and staff, the development of a universal CAS Housing Regulations Guidebook that sets standards for all AHBs is advised.
- Providing enhanced clarity on access opportunities for CAS for Care Leavers' properties, followed by annual re-assessment of care leaver housing needs.
- Development of a user-friendly tenancy agreement in collaboration with youth accommodated in CAS for Care Leavers' properties.
- Development of an online organisational system to track maintenance procedures, to allow for transparency and accountability.
- Expansion of multidisciplinary teams with greater focus on enhancing education and employment support.

Conclusion

This project demonstrates the importance of the CAS for Care Leavers and the model of care provided by PMVT in preventing youth homelessness and fostering security and stability for young individuals exiting State care. The provision of stable housing, in conjunction with wraparound support services, served as a foundation for youth progression towards independence. Addressing the obstacles identified by the participants in this study would empower youth to continue with their further integration into society, develop new skills, and explore additional avenues for personal growth along their life journey.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Youth Homelessness – Definition and Prevalence

In the past twenty years, the homeless landscape has undergone a significant transformation. While single middle-aged men continue to be overrepresented in homelessness, there has been a notable increase in the prevalence of homelessness among women, families, youth, and immigrants (Baptista & Marlier, 2019; European Parliament et al., 2023; OECD, 2021). Due to increasing evidence of young people seeking assistance from homeless shelters and related supports worldwide, youth homelessness has emerged as a pressing public concern (European Parliament et al., 2023; Cournède & Plouin, 2021). According to OECD reports, approximately 30% of the homeless population are identified as young adults in Australia, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Costa Rica (OECD, 2020). Where an increase in youth homelessness of over 50% was reported in the Netherlands from 2010 to 2018, a rise of 30% in New Zealand spanning the period of 2006 to 2018, and 20% increase in Australia between 2011 and 2016 (Cournède & Plouin, 2020; OECD, 2020).

Globally, youth homelessness is viewed as a complex social phenomenon, deeply rooted in social challenges including lack of housing, poverty, social exclusion, and discrimination (Bretherton & Pleace, 2023; European Parliament et al., 2023; Morton et al., 2018). A myriad of previous research has highlighted the distinction between youth and adult homelessness, including differences in the risks to, experiences of and exits out of homelessness (Crane, 2013; Gaetz, 2014; Milburn, 2014; Wirehag & Jones, 2014). Impediments to developing essential life skills for independent living, coupled with limited social and educational support systems can amplify youth vulnerabilities to homelessness (Crane, 2013; Gaetz, 2014; Milburn, 2014; Wirehag & Jones, 2014).

As respective national governments and organisations pursue attempts to tackle the issue of youth homelessness, defining the nature of youth homelessness represents the first challenge in understanding the underlying causes, preventing it from taking place, as well as addressing and providing targeted support once it occurs. Various institutions across the world are subsequently navigating the complexities on how to define 'youth homelessness' (FEANTSA, 2020; United Nations, 2021). One of the most prevalent approaches is categorisation through age, for example while the United Nations defines 'youth' as those between the ages of 15 to 24, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) applies a different age category, focusing on the age range between 13 to 26 (FEANTSA, 2020; United Nations, 2021). The variations in age brackets often reflect cultural perceptions on the concept of youth, where key life milestones, such as transitioning from childhood to adulthood or dependent to independent living, can vary across cultures and countries (Cepa & Furstenberg, 2021; van de Berg al., 2021).

Comparisons have been devised across European states due to evident distinctions in welfare systems, perceptions of autonomy, and family connections, all of which impact youth transition to independence (Cepa & Furstenberg, 2021; van de Berg al., 2021). In addition, youth progression into adulthood has been identified as a specific period whereby an individual's susceptibility to entering homelessness is high, especially when vulnerable young people are unable to find, afford, and/or maintain independent accommodation, particularly when having to leave the parental home early or leaving state care (Giano et al., 2020; Glynn, 2021). Intersecting identities, including being a member of certain groups such as the LGBTIQ community, ethnic minorities, and female single parents, create additional challenges and place

youth at higher risk of homelessness (Giano et al., 2020; Lurie et al., 2015). Understanding how the diverse needs of youth manifest as visible and covert barriers to accessing housing opportunities is imperative for preventing youth homelessness from occurring.

Youth Homelessness in Ireland

In January 2016, 640 individuals aged 18-24 were identified as homeless through accessing emergency accommodation supports in Ireland (Department of Environment, Community & Local Government, 2016). However by August 2023, the number of youth accessing these services increased to 1,520 (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2023). While both figures represent 17% of the total homeless population at the time, there is a notable increase of 138% in youth directly accessing emergency accommodation services. Additionally, it is argued that youth may be deterred from engaging with adult emergency accommodation services and up to twice as many youth in Ireland may be experiencing different forms of hidden homelessness. (Hearne & McSweeney; Maycock & Parker, 2020).

Specific subgroups of young individuals have also been identified by the Irish Government at an increased risk of experiencing homelessness, including those transitioning out of State care, youth with disabilities, single parents, members of the Travelling community, members of the LGBTIQ+ community, and individuals leaving prison (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2022). As such, an increased Government focus appears to be on preventing youth within these groups from entering homelessness, improving their experiences of emergency accommodation if they become homeless, and aiding existing homelessness into stable housing (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2022).

With this in mind, the Irish Government focus is in line with international trends in homelessness policies evolving from individual social interventions towards housing-led approaches (Gaetz & Buchnea, 2023; Pleace & Quiglar, 2013). This is due to a wealth of previous research highlighting the benefits housing stability has across a variety of life domains including physical health (Lim et al., 2018), psychological well-being (Aubrey et al., 2019) and social inclusion (Ben Haman et al., 2021). As such, a key area recognised for the prevention and mitigation of youth homelessness lies in the realm of securing housing access and gaining housing stability. This approach is recognised in Ireland's Youth Homeless Strategy (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2022), in addition to other European nations such as Finland (Pleace, 2017) and the Netherlands (Oostveen, 2019).

Irish Policy Approach to Youth Homelessness

Within an Irish context, the subject of youth homelessness has been recognised since the 'Child Care Act 1991', which listed the safeguarding of homeless children as one of its main priorities (Government of Ireland, 1991). The legislation stated that, in the event of a child being homeless, the responsibility is with the State to ensure that they are provided with suitable accommodation (Government of Ireland, 1991). Throughout the years, youth homelessness became increasingly recognised in Irish society, with the first action plan titled '*Youth Homeless Strategy*' released in 2001 (Department of Health and Children, 2001). The principal goal of this strategy was to reduce and eliminate all forms of youth homelessness through the provision of adequate preventative services for youth at risk. In the event of a youth becoming homeless, the strategy details that effective response services need to be provided including suitable accommodation and appropriate health, educational, and recreational resources (Department of Health and Children, 2001). Other government strategies also listed youth homelessness as being a key priority, such as '*The Way Home*' in 2008, '*Rebuilding Ireland in 2016*', and the

'Housing First Implementation Plan 2018-2021'. The 'Housing First Implementation Plan 2018-2021' recognised the distinct experiences of youth in comparison to older cohorts experiencing homelessness. Where, Housing First as an approach for reducing homelessness among youth was highlighted as a possible avenue that should be taken into consideration.

The report highlighted how Housing First for Youth projects in Ireland are predominantly focused on State care leavers and emphasised the importance and substantial involvement of Tusla in the provision of support services for youth transitioning out of State care (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2018).

In 2022, the Irish Government released the second youth homeless strategy 'Youth Homelessness Strategy 2023-2025' advocating for a collaborative effort to tackle the distinct causes of youth homelessness. The overarching objective of the strategy centres on mitigating and providing support to youth who are susceptible to, or are currently homeless. Importantly, the strategy defines a young person as an individual within the age range of 18 to 24, while recognising that vulnerabilities to homelessness do begin at earlier life stage. Moreover, the strategy also recognises that youth facing homelessness exhibit unique accommodation, healthcare, and support needs, distinct from those of the wider homeless population. This action plan subsequently has three overarching aims; the first aim is to prevent young people from entering homelessness by informing youth of their housing entitlements, implementing preventative programmes, and ensuring effective collaboration between Tusla and the relevant local authorities. The second aim is to enhance service provision offered within emergency accommodation to young people and the strategy emphasises the role of offering person-centred support tailored to the young person's needs, especially in the areas of mental health, trauma-informed care, and educational support. Lastly, the final aim is to support young people in exiting homelessness by helping them transition into pathways for long-term housing. These pathways include establishing housing programmes explicitly for youth who are at high-risk of homelessness, and piloting social housing as shared accommodation (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2022).

Care Leavers – Precarity in Outcomes

Within the 'Youth Homeless Strategy 2023-2025' young people leaving care are listed as a cohort vulnerable to entering homelessness. These individuals have a higher propensity to have experienced adverse childhood experiences with unstable living situations in either residential or foster care settings (Butterworth et al., 2016). These young people's experiences in care can have a profound impact on their development which can greatly influence their lifespan trajectories. For example, a scoping review of the literature highlighted that care leavers often face poorer outcomes in education, employment and income when compared to their peers who did not grow up in care (Woodgate, Morakinyo & Martin, 2017). In addition, other negative psychosocial outcomes were noted such as poorer mental health, a higher rate of challenging behaviour problems, and increased rates of criminal activity (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019).

Furthermore, an abundance of research has emerged emphasising some of the challenges care leavers encounter when exiting care and navigating independent living. The transition is often accompanied by feelings of isolation and loneliness (Sulimani-Aidan, 2014), in addition to other practical challenges such as an inadequately prepared to cook and manage finances (Harris, 2009). Palmer et al. (2022) also outlined how the difficulty of this transition can be exacerbated due to the 'care cliff' phenomenon. The phenomenon occurs when several types of support are abruptly withdrawn at the age of 18, leading to experiences of 'accelerated adulthood' where care leavers are required to live independently, where the psychosocial skills and community support systems are not thoroughly developed to sustain this lifestyle (Palmer, Norris & Kelleher, 2022). Understandably, the swift nature of the transition can contribute to increased levels of isolation and feeling inadequately equipped to cope with the burden of

independent living (Sulimani-Aidan, 2014). This experience can have far-reaching impacts on housing stability, education and employment engagement, as well as on youths well-being, and social inclusion (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019). One study in particular highlights the importance of strong social networks and how these can support the transition and housing stability of youth aging out of care (Melkman, 2017). As such, it is imperative to understand the practical, social, and psychological supports necessary to support care leavers in Ireland make the transition to adulthood and to sustain independent living without experiencing homelessness.

In Ireland, the Government Child and Family agency - Tusla - plays a central role in the transition of care leavers to independent living. The Tusla policy framework titled the '*National Aftercare Policy for Alternative Care*' details an action plan committed to ensuring the continuation of social support for care leavers once they have made that transition out of care (Tusla, 2017). Once individuals in Ireland reach 18, state funding for care ceases, aligning with the Irish Childcare Act 1991 and the Childcare (Amendment) Act 2015. However, when Tusla acknowledges the necessity for further assistance after the age of 18, aftercare services become available. These services include a range of supports in the areas of education and training, housing, monetary payments, and health care provision until the age of 21. Moreover, if care leavers pursue education or apprenticeships, these supports can extend until the age of 23, as stipulated by Tusla (2017). Considering that care leavers are at elevated risk of experiencing homelessness, prior to leaving care, individualised and targeted supports are needed to allow the smooth transition into stability and independent living, as well as to mitigate the risks of entering and being entrapped in homelessness.

The Capital Assistance Scheme for Care Leavers

One of the major government developments to address supporting housing instability for care leavers was the expansion of the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) in 2017 to include this cohort. CAS was initially launched in 1984 to finance the delivery of social housing through Approved Housing Bodies (AHB's), which are non-profit housing associations that provide social housing (Approved Housing Bodies Regulatory Authority, 2023). The financial costs are remunerated by the relevant local authority, and the AHBs do not need to make any repayments on the grounds that they adhere to the scheme's conditions. The overall purpose of the scheme is to provide accommodation to prioritised groups such as elderly people, people experiencing homelessness, and people with disabilities (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2022a; Norris, Palmer, Kelleher, 2022). In 2017, the Department of Housing published a circular announcing that the CAS would be expanded to include individuals leaving care who were deemed at risk of entering homelessness (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, 2017).

The process by which an AHB acquires a CAS property through a local authority is considered to be a lengthy procedure, with the Irish Council for Social Housing (2022) documenting that it can over 100 weeks. AHBs need to be registered with the Approved Housing Body Regulatory Authority prior to commencing an application for CAS funding. Initially, an AHB property acquisition process typically begins by identifying a valid demand for social housing funded through CAS in a particular region area. In the context of the CAS for Care Leavers, this entails demonstrating that there are individuals in State care who are likely to enter homelessness once they leave care. The AHBs will also document the estimated funding needed to acquire the property and undertake renovations if necessary (Irish Council for Social Housing, 2022). Once the care leaver has transitioned into a property, the role of the AHB can vary greatly. Some AHBs may only provide practical tenancy management support, however, in the case of individuals with multiple complex needs, a multifaceted, psychosocial support plan may be required. A review of the CAS for Care Leavers has previously highlighted that this scheme supports the government-led initiative to prevent and mitigate the risks associated with transitioning into independent living (Norris, Palmer, Kelleher, 2022).

The development of the CAS for Care Leavers underlines the enduring responsibility of AHBs to maintain a sustained engagement with care leavers over an extended period of time. As a result, assessing the nature and quality of support provided by AHBs becomes essential in ensuring care leavers receive adequate support in the areas of independent living and fostering social integration. Engagement with care leavers on their experiences with AHBs, and investigating the role AHBs play in supporting their tenancy sustainment and social outcomes can subsequently place the voices of care leavers at the forefront of service provision. By listening to the perspectives of care leavers, the allocation of support to tackle the evolving needs and challenges encountered by these young people can be met.

Chapter 2:

Peter McVerry Trust and the CAS for Care Leavers Model of Care

Peter McVerry Trust (PMVT) plays a central role in acquiring suitable properties for people who are vulnerable to, or in active homelessness. In regards to the CAS for Care Leavers, PMVT provides a range of services and resources available to youth leaving care. These are highlighted in the following sections;

- 1) Property Allocation, Acquisition and CAS for Care Leavers Portfolio
- 2) PMVT Services Available to Participants
- 3) CAS for Care Leavers Participant Profile and Tenancy Sustainment Rates

Property Allocation, Acquisition and CAS for Care Leavers Portfolio

At the outset, PMVT engagement with the CAS for Care Leavers involves a Tusla assigned aftercare worker advocating on behalf of a care leaver to the relevant aftercare steering committee in a specific geographical region. Individuals who are proposed for the CAS for Care Leavers may be either transitioning out of care, living in existing short-term accommodation (such as student or private rented accommodation), or engaging with homelessness services. The steering committee commonly considers a care leaver's suitability based on their capability of living independently, level of complex needs, and risk of becoming homeless. Upon receiving approval from the steering committee, the engagement with PMVT housing development commences.

Stages of Housing Development

The four main stages of the CAS housing acquisition system are described below; however, it is important to note that as this process requires multiple interagency engagements within each stage of the PMVT housing development process, timeframes for project completion can vary.

Stage 1: Under Appraisal – During the appraisal phase, multiple avenues are utilised by PMVT to search for and acquire suitable CAS properties, including acquisition from the open market, private vendors, or existing housing stock managed by PMVT. Upon identification of a potential property by the PMVT housing development team, engagement is initiated with the relevant local authority to assess the feasibility and suitability of acquiring and using this property through CAS funding. If approval is granted by the local authority to PMVT, stage 2 will commence.

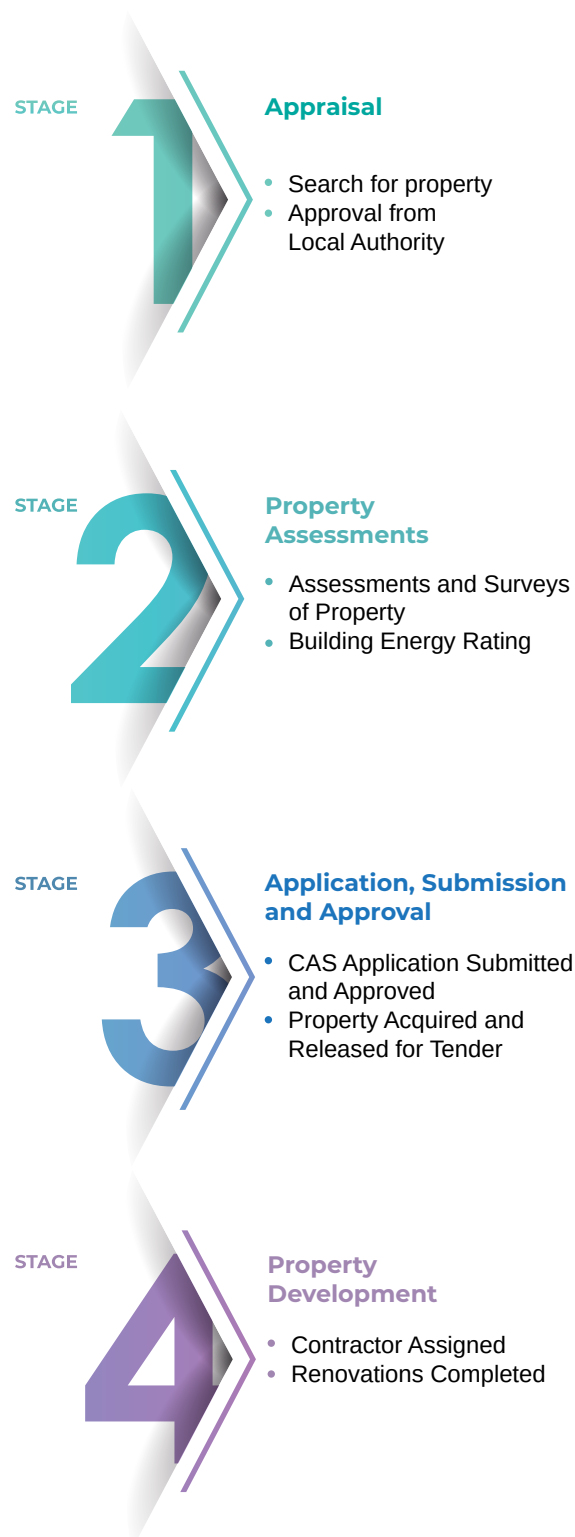
Stage 2: Property Assessments – Formal assessments and surveys of the property, such as open market valuation, evaluations of necessary renovations, retrofitting, refurbishments, and a conditions survey are undertaken in this stage. Acquisition of a building energy rating (BER) is also part of this process. Subsequently, all gathered information is compiled to develop an official CAS application form.

Stage 3: Application Submission and Approval – Submission of the CAS application, including detailed project cost information from the previous stage, is made to the relevant local authority. The local authority then assesses the application and evaluate the costs associated with property purchase and required construction works. If deemed suitable, approval is granted, enabling PMVT to purchase the property with CAS funding support. After finalising the property acquisition, the project is tendered out to contractors.

Stage 4: Property Development – A contractor is assigned to the project and once all construction and refurbishment work is finished, the property is considered ready for occupancy. The housing development project concludes, and the keys are handed over to PMVT Housing with Support Services to take over the property and initiate engagement with the assigned care leaver tenant.

A summary of the PMVT housing development process is provided in the graph below (see Figure 2.1)

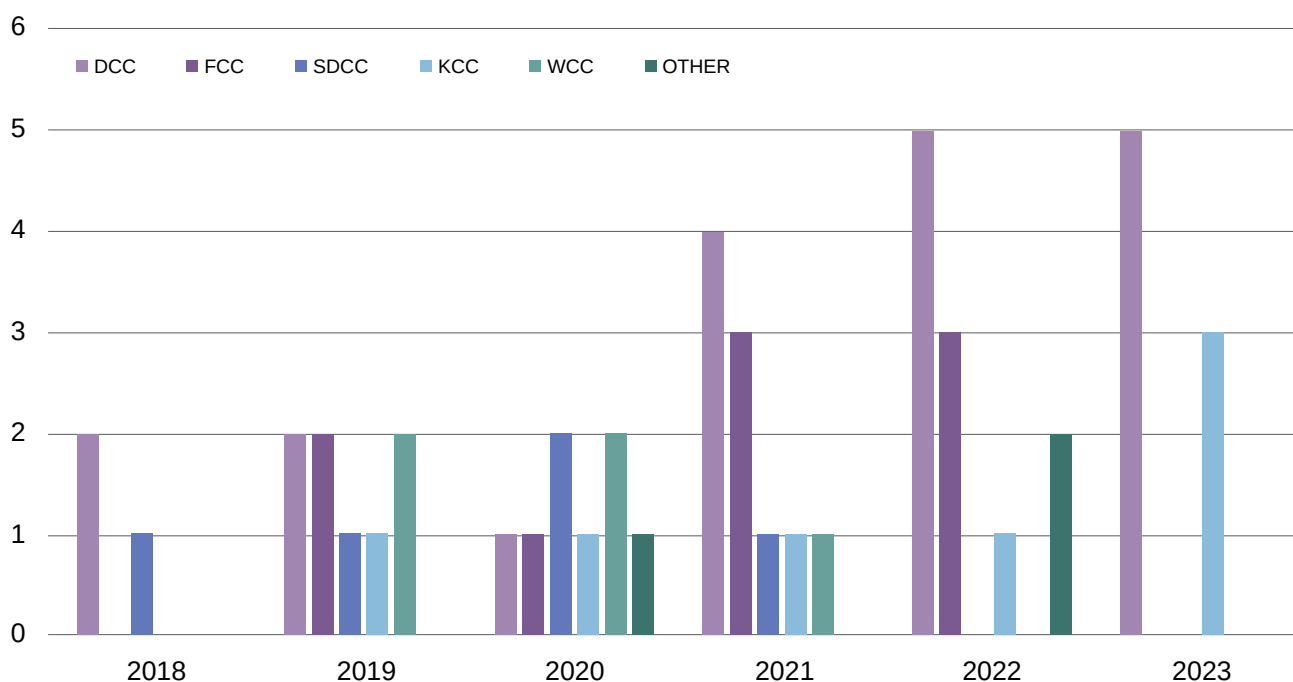
Figure 2.1 Illustration of PMVT's Housing Development Process



PMVT CAS for Care Leavers Property Portfolio

As of September 2023, PMVT acquired and managed 48 CAS for Care Leavers properties across a variety of local authorities including Dublin City Council (DCC), Fingal County Council (FCC), South Dublin County Council (SDCC), Kildare County Council (KCC), and Westmeath County Council (WCC). Cavan County Council, Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council, and Wicklow County Council, all of which have one property each, are all represented in the 'OTHER' category (see Figure 2.2). The highest number of properties were acquired in 2022 (23%, n=11), and specifically within the Dublin City Council area (n=5).

Figure 2.2 PMVT CAS for Care Leavers Property Procurement 2018-2023



PMVT Services Available to Care Leavers

PMVT also offers a wide variety of social services to care leavers, including regular key working sessions through Housing with Supports, and access to support services for addressing drug and/or alcohol misuse, education and employment activation and Individual Placement Supports. Care leavers who would have engaged with PMVT during their time in children's residential care and/or aftercare services while under 18, often maintain ongoing involvement with the facilities and staff for continued support and engagement.

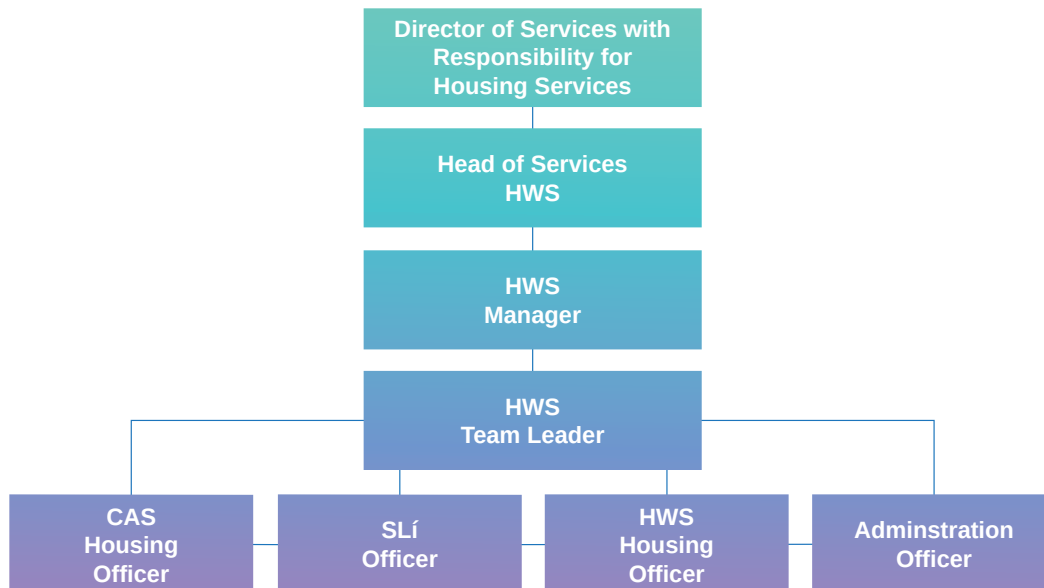
Housing with Supports

Housing with Supports (HWS) is the main framework through which housing support and social care are provided to care leavers in CAS for Care Leaver funded properties. HWS provides social housing to individuals with previous experiences of homelessness, in addition to social support with the overarching goal of developing independent living skills and enhancing social inclusion.

The Director of Services with Responsibility for Housing Services oversees the national HWS service in PMVT. In conjunction with the Head of Services for Housing with Supports, senior management are responsible for the effective functioning of these services across the country.

The HWS manager directly supervises and supports the team, including all project workers. Likewise, the HWS team leader also directly supports all housing officers, assisting them with any issues they have and providing them with guidance if required. Housing officers in the HWS team can be divided into CAS housing officers (who primarily support youth with experiences of care), HWS housing officers who provide similar support to a variety of people with housing needs, and support to live independently (SLI) housing officers who provide targeted support in the move into either local authority or private rented properties. Administration officers are also available to provide additional assistance on the ground (see Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3 Flowchart of the PMVT Housing with Supports Staff



PMVT Children’s Residential Centres and Aftercare Services

Care leavers from PMVT children’s residential centres and aftercare services will sustain ongoing involvement with personnel from these services pre, during and post-transition into their CAS property. Often, care leavers will still routinely communicate with children’s residential and aftercare support staff for any advice or support that they require after transitioning to their CAS properties.

Addiction Day Treatment and Residential Stabilisation Services

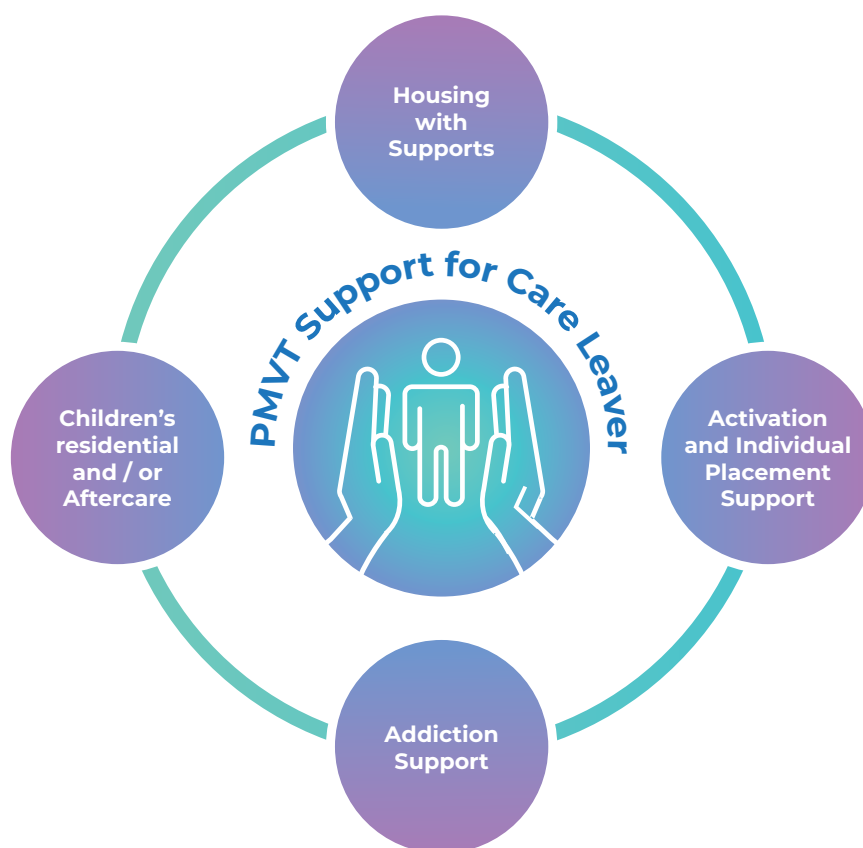
These services are underpinned by the seeking safety model, which specifically caters to individuals with an identified need and who require support in addressing trauma, substance use and/or PTSD. The Residential Stabilisation Services offer a therapeutic and safe space for individuals to detox and/or stabilize their substance use (including cocaine, cannabis and/or alcohol). The addiction day services provide access to ongoing drug-free assistance from trained professionals and offer opportunities to develop support frameworks with their peers. People engaging with these services are supported to return to their optimum level of functioning and empowered to learn how to lead a drug free life while stabilising on their prescribed medication with the support of a multidisciplinary team.

Activation and Individual Placement Supports

The Activation and Individual Placement Support services are available to all PMVT supported individuals and provide dedicated assistance for those wishing to return to work, training, or education. This service usually engages with individuals after they have completed and submitted an activation referral with their housing officer. Various areas are explored within this application form such as previous educational and employment history, and future work preferences or interests. Following this, the team engages with the participant to devise a plan to assist them in achieving their desired educational or vocational goals.

Illustration of all PMVT support services for care leavers is available in below Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4 Illustration of PMVT support services for care leavers



Cas for Care Leavers Participant Profile and Tenancy Sustainment Rates

Demographic profile of current participants

As an AHB, PMVT provides housing through CAS funding and social care support to young people across Dublin, Westmeath, Cork, Cavan, Wicklow, and Kildare areas. As of September 2023, 50 young people were residing in CAS properties provided by PMVT¹. Of this, 19 identified as female, 30 as male, and 1 as other. Most participants are aged between 21-24 (86%) and engaged with PMVT support services between once a month (44%) to every three months (42%) (see Table 2.1).

¹ 50 youth are accommodated in 48 properties, where 2 sets of 2 youth are co-habiting.

Table 2.1 Profile of youth accommodated in the CAS for Care Leavers properties

Gender	N	%
Male	30	60
Female	19	38
Other	1	2

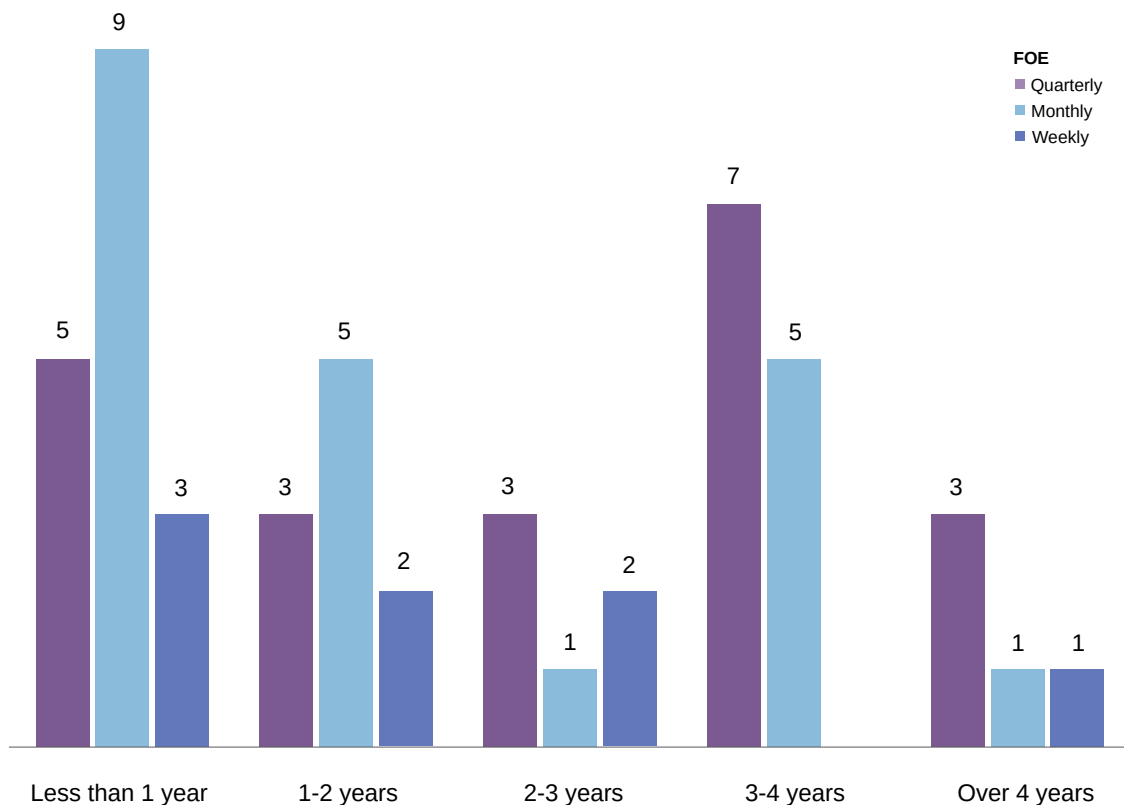
Age		
18-20	8	16
21-24	35	70
Over 25	7	14

Local Authority		
Dublin City Council	18	36
Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	1	2
Fingal County Council	9	18
South Dublin County Council	6	12
Kildare County Council	7	14
Cavan County Council	2	4
Westmeath County Council	5	10
Wicklow County Council	1	2
Cork County Council	1	2

PMVT Level of Engagement (In-person Meetings)		
Weekly	7	14
Monthly	22	44
Quarterly	21	42

For most youths, those who live longer in their properties also tended to require less support from PMVT over time. As Figure 2.5 illustrates the proportion of youth who require weekly in-person engagements reduces overtime the longer they resided in their property.

Figure 2.5 Youth length of time in properties in relation to the frequency of in-person engagements (FOE) with PMVT



Retention rates and progression routes

Since 2018, 55 youth have been provided properties from PMVT through the CAS for Care Leavers and 50 individuals continue to be supported through this scheme. Of the five no longer in CAS properties, three youth surrendered their property and continue to be offered supports by PMVT through their supported temporary accommodation and the addiction support services. The other two individuals were supported by PMVT to progress onto local authority housing in response to individual and family needs. They also continue to be provided social support from PMVT.

Conclusion

Within this chapter, several key PMVT structural elements related to youth allocation, property acquisition and PMVT CAS housing portfolio were discussed. The services accessible for youth in CAS properties were also described, where supports are available across a wide range of disciplines including social, health and employment. With regards to the participant profiles and tenancy sustainment rates, of the 55 youth who have accessed CAS properties managed by PMVT, evidence indicated high retention rates and reduced social care engagements across time. The following sections progress onto discuss the current research study including the methodology, findings, discussion and recommendations from the report.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Aims and Objectives of the Study

Given the comprehensive range of services and support provided to young individuals residing in CAS for Care Leaver properties managed by PMVT, this study aimed to explore the impact of PMVT's CAS for Care Leavers model of care.

This framework is assessed by targeting the following objectives:

Objective 1.

To understand the lived experiences of the youth accommodated in Cas for Care Leavers properties; including challenges encountered when transitioning into properties, livelihoods once accommodated, and access to support.

Objective 2.

To examine PMVT staff members' perspectives on the CAS for Care Leavers, as well as to identify key challenges they encounter.

Objective 3.

To identify the additional supports required by youth accommodated in the CAS for Care Leavers properties.

Objective 4.

To inform future service decision-making in supporting the expressed needs of youth be heard and recognised.

Study Design

To capture a robust understanding of the CAS for Care Leavers model of care provided by PMVT, qualitative research methods, including semi-structured interviews and a series of focus groups were used. Qualitative methodologies were chosen due to their 'flexible, fluid and facilitative' nature which enables participants' voices to be heard and is found to be particularly useful when investigating vulnerable and hard to reach populations (Creswell and Poth, 2016; Martin and Kunnen, 2008).

Sampling and Recruitment

All the participants in the study were recruited within PMVT CAS for Care Leaver's model.

The recruitment of the youth participants

The recruitment took place between March and June 2023, and was facilitated through the staff members/management working directly with the youth. To be eligible for participation in the study, the individual had to be between 18 to 25, have a history of State care and have been accommodated in a PMVT Cas for Care Leavers property for over 6 months. In line with PMVT's Research Ethics Policy, youth were screened independently by two senior management and those who experienced "*problematic alcohol/substance use which impacts on a person's daily living; OR/ AND acute mental and/or physical symptoms of distress which impact a person's daily living*" were

not considered for participation at the time. A housing officer subsequently facilitated the initial contact and recruitment of the eligible participants.

The recruitment of PMVT staff participants

All staff members involved in PMVT's Cas for Care Leavers model of care, including front line staff and management, were invited to partake in the research study. The recruitment of the staff members was facilitated by contacting the management of the services.

Prior to participation in the study, all potential participants (youth and PMVT staff) were provided with detailed information on the study and participation requirements through informal conversation and the provision of information sheets. All participants were also provided with a 1-week cooling off period to reflect on their willingness to participate in the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews

In total, 11 youth were recruited to participate in the interviews. The interviews were semi-structured in nature, with some pre-determined questions exploring: the individual's experiences of leaving care and transitioning to the property, their perceptions regarding PMVT support and how the acquired property has influenced diverse facets of their lives. All interviews were conducted in person and lasted between 30 to 45 minutes.

Focus groups

A total of 9 staff members from PMVT were represented within three focus groups. In a similar manner to the interviews, the researchers had a series of pre-determined open-ended questions for each focus group which allowed the interviewees an opportunity to guide the conversation and express their views. Each focus group was conducted online, through the Microsoft Teams platform, and lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Data Analysis

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. An inductive approach was applied by two researchers to independently code anonymised transcripts and develop a coding framework. Thematic analysis was employed for data analysis. The process of coding, as well as the organisation of themes, was carried out using NVivo computer software

Ethical Procedures and Considerations

Prior to the commencement of the project, ethical approval from Tusla's Research Ethics Committee had been received.

It is important to acknowledge that this project was funded by the Housing Agency through their Research Support Programme for 2023. However, an external researcher as a primary author of this project contributes to the external validity of the project.

Considering the vulnerabilities of young people leaving care, the research team fully abided by the PMVT Research Ethics Policy, ensuring that:

- 1) The ethical principles of voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality, and dignity and respect, were always followed.
- 2) Power dynamics in the relationship between the PMVT research team and potential participants were acknowledged and every procedure was followed to mitigate the influence this may have had.

In addition to this, it is important to note two key points:

- 1) To support youth engagement with the project and empower them to voice their thoughts, all youth were provided with the option for the interview to be in a PMVT Office or in their home setting. All youth requested an at home visit.
- 2) A feedback loop was integrated into the draft development process where all internal stakeholders, including youth and PMVT staff members, were provided with the opportunity to review and offer any feedback on the final draft of the report. The final draft of the report was provided as both a full draft and a plain English summary version to support accessibility.



Chapter 4: Participant Profiles

This chapter provides an overview of the research participants backgrounds, including the profile of young people accommodated in CAS for Care Leavers properties and PMVT internal stakeholders.

Youth Participant Profile

In total 11 people, seven males and four females participated in this project (see Table 4.1 below). All youth were in the age range of 19 to 25, with an average age of 23.

The young people interviewed had a wide range of experiences when it came to employment and education. Four youth were in active employment at the time of the study; two were in full-time positions, and two were in part-time work. Of the seven unemployed, four were enrolled to commence with education in September 2023. The other youth who were unemployed spoke of seeking employment and expressed interest in further education while taking on temporary work in entertainment or the service industry.

With regards to education, one young person mentioned they were in active education during the summer, while another three were commencing with a new course in September 2023. The educational interests varied from early childcare and social studies to animal care. Several youth who ceased their further education disclosed mental health issues and a lack of interest in chosen courses as the main reasons for their decision to withdraw. They also revealed a possibility in pursuing social care work and training in the future.

At the time of the interviews, most of the youth (n=8) received the social welfare payments. A detailed profile of youth participants is available below (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Youth Participant Profile

	Age	Gender	Enrolled in Further Education	Employment Status	Social Welfare
1	24	M	No	Unemployed	Yes
2	23	M	No	Unemployed	Yes
3	22	F	Yes, initiating September 2023	Full-Time	No
4	19	F	Yes, initiating September 2023	Part-Time	Yes
5	25	M	No	Full-Time	No
6	23	M	No	Unemployed	Yes
7	24	F	No	Unemployed	Yes
8	23	F	Yes, initiating September 2023	Unemployed	Yes
9	22	M	Yes, initiating September 2023	Unemployed	Yes
10	22	M	No	Part-Time	No
11	23	M	No	Unemployed	Yes

PMVT Staff Members Participant Profiles

The focus groups were organised as Focus group 1 – CAS housing officers who continuously engaged with and supported the young people after transitioning into their properties; Focus group 2 – aftercare support workers who assisted with the transition of the young people from PMVT aftercare services into their new properties and offered ongoing outreach support for youth in CAS for Care Leaver properties; Focus group 3 – managers/directors who are responsible for the overall management of the PMVT CAS for Care Leavers model of care (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Breakdown of Internal Stakeholders in Focus Groups

	Pseudonym
Focus Group 1 PMVT CAS Housing Officers	KW1
	KW2
	KW3
Focus Group 2 PMVT Aftercare Support Workers	ACW1
	ACW2
	ACW3
Focus Group 3 Directors and HWS Management	D1
	D2
	D3



Chapter 5:

Findings from Youth living in CAS for Care Leaver Properties

In order to gain a better understanding of youth experiences in CAS for Care Leaver properties managed by PMVT, the upcoming chapter explores the journey's of youth in accessing these properties and the experiences of youth navigating a new stage of life. The results from 11 interviews with youth living in CAS for Care Leavers properties are illustrated in two sections; the first section of this chapter provides insight into previous housing history and accessing CAS for Care Leaver properties. While the second section offers an in-depth exploration of the perceived support provided by PMVT in supporting youth's overall needs, well-being and social inclusion (reflected through engagement in education and employment). Experiences of addiction, ethnic minority, international protection, early teenage pregnancy and motherhood were additional elements that influenced the housing journey's of the youth interviewed for this project.

Pathways to CAS for Care Leaver Properties

Accessing a CAS for Care Leavers Property

Prior to accessing CAS for Care Leaver properties, all youth spoke of having a history of unstable living situations and reflected on their journeys into CAS properties. Their trajectories through the Irish care system involved negotiating multiple experiences in both residential and foster care settings and for some this also included episodes of homelessness. The perceived prerequisites for accessing housing through this funding model and why youth think they were offered the housing was also discussed.

History of Unstable Living

All youth interviewed for this project spoke of experiencing multiple changing living situations while engaging and transitioning out of the Irish care system. In particular, one youth emphasised their frustration with the inconsistency of their care placements; *"I got moved around for 3 and a half years every night. For 3 and a half years even on Christmas Day. Even on my birthday, like they didn't have a full-time placement for me because I was 13 and nobody wanted a 13-year-old"* (P4). Another youth who was placed in 3 separate residential services from the ages of 11 to 18 also spoke of their experiences engaging in foster care; *"They try to put you into like foster homes...I didn't feel like I was part of that. I felt like an outsider"*(P11). From very young ages, youth mentioned that they had engaged with a wide range of care services across multiple locations.

While a positive experience of a good and stable foster home was mentioned, most individuals still faced barriers and challenges in accessing housing when they turned 18 or when they were transitioning out of aftercare services. Several young men spoke of their experiences of homelessness (n=3), which occurred prior to engaging in aftercare services and also when attempting to navigate the private rental market; *"I became homeless when I was like 20 during COVID...your man sold the building like...So I was homeless again, like that's the second time I was homeless, just over landlords"* (P11). Often, these young men entered and exited homelessness multiple times while transitioning out of care and also when trying to engage with the private rental market. The frequency of relocations within and transitioning out of the Irish care system established youths housing trajectory journeys to be marred with high levels of instability and uncertainty.

Access to the Property

Most youth emphasised the engagement and efficacy of their Tusla assigned aftercare workers in advocating and supporting their access to CAS for Care funded properties. It was believed that high quality service provision from these individuals was fundamental to gaining access to this form of housing support. In one interview, a youth highlighted that he knew of two other individuals from similar backgrounds applying for CAS funded properties and while their applications were rejected, he noted; *"I think I got it because I had a good aftercare worker... if I had a bad aftercare worker, I don't think I would have got this place."* (P5). The knowledge base and skills of the allocated Tusla aftercare worker were thought to contribute significantly as to why youth believed they received these properties; *"she [Tusla aftercare worker] kind of done the whole thing and stuff because she was based around this area, so I think she had a lot more contacts and stuff than just the council and stuff like that"* (P8). All youth spoke highly of their assigned Tusla Aftercare workers and valued their roles in accessing the CAS for Care Leavers funded properties.

In addition to this, the youth interviewed for this project demonstrated a wide variety of rationales as to why they got the properties over other care leavers. Some youth believed they needed to have demonstrated prior experiences of living independently, while others showed no evidence of living independently prior to moving into these properties. However, underpinning the eligibility criteria for accessing these properties was believed to be *"more luck than anything"* (P11). From the experiences of another youth, he believed that *"it's like a lottery, the way you get housing"* (P5). Apart from a history of care, there appeared to be a wide variety of initial needs, independent living skills and educational and employment backgrounds for youth when they first received access to these properties.

Initial Engagement with PMVT

The following section explores youths perspectives on their initial engagement with PMVT and provides an overview of their transition into new living situations which includes navigating the transition and engaging with the PMVT tenancy agreement.

Navigating the Transition

For most, the day of entry into their new property coincided with a scheduled meeting with the PMVT HWS manager and prospective PMVT assigned CAS housing officer, where the signing of a standard tenancy agreement finalised the moving-in process. In most cases, the first time a youth entered a property was the first time they would have seen the property and become aware of the exact location; *"that's the one thing I did not like, because I didn't get to see it first. I didn't get to know exactly where or how far I needed to travel and if I needed a car because I don't drive at the moment"* (P2). While some youth had the opportunity to preview and explore the property, the rest of the youth expressed that the lack of prior information provided on the properties impeded their abilities to mentally and physically prepare to live in a new and independent way.

Following this first encounter, youth were provided with the keys to their fully furnished property. *"I remember the first day they [PMVT] left me, I sat right there...just looking around and I didn't know what to do with myself"* (P3). The early days of living in the property alone were generally described as lonely in comparison to previous living situations; *"well, it was very lonely, very, very lonely. I was probably just trying to get used to being in the house by myself"* (P3). Particularly for young people transitioning from experiences in residential services, the sentiment of loneliness and isolation resonated strongly; *"So, when I lived there [residential service], I had so much support. So much banter every day. Cooking with them, watching movies with them. Like, you know what I mean?"* (P5). The youth were also struggling to adapt

to a new way of living; *“I was like spending money and stuff and then realised, oh, I only have this certain amount for the week, so it was like trying to balance what I needed to spend it on...it was a big transition at the start”* (P6). The decline in support, shifting from continual accessibility to adapting to independent living was particularly prominent during this key transitional period. However overtime, the young people settled in and the value of a CAS property was highlighted in *“that it gives me more independence and stuff. I’ve always wanted that”* (P6).

Tenancy Agreement and Rules

As a result of this initial experience of signing the tenancy agreement, how people navigated and understood the rules around their tenancy and property management varied. The tenancy agreement included a 6-month probationary period, along with property management regulations, and household maintenance guidelines. During the initial meeting, youth and PMVT support staff dedicated time to collectively reviewing the contract. However, youth often displayed low levels of engagement and interest in the content of the document at the time; *“Yeah, my aftercare worker went through it, I signed it. To be honest, I don’t really look at all them things”* (P6). These experiences emerged from a potentially overwhelming first encounter where a young person is being provided with a new property, meeting new people, and being asked to sign important documents on the same day. Additionally, some young people appeared to have been emotionally overwhelmed by the significance of having a place to live and the feelings of *“this is mine now”* (P8). As a result, uncertainties regarding the practical aspects and longevity of tenancy emerged only after youth began settling into their new properties.

After having some time to reflect, certain aspects of the tenancy agreement that seemed perplexing started to come to light. Concerns were focused on the lack of clarity regarding the potential long-term arrangements of the tenancy. A heightened anxiety was noted regarding how their tenancies would be affected if their life circumstances were to change.

Temporary changes; *“Let’s say I want to go away for a year, you know how everyone’s going to Australia or something? They go there for a year and then just come back. Am I allowed to leave this place for a year?”* (P5), as well as more permanent ones; *“I don’t know how it works in the sense, like if I did get a girl pregnant or whatever, and I had kids. I’d probably have to give this up or whatever, I don’t know how it would work”* (P11). These experiences emerged from potentially overwhelming first encounters, limited information and time to reflect on the practicalities of signing onto the CAS for Care Leavers.

Youth also raised anxieties regarding potential future changes in their existing tenancy agreement that would be out of their control; *“I don’t know, they’ll [PMVT] get less funding or something, I don’t know, there’s a big recession coming and all of a sudden they can’t afford this anymore and they’ll take it away from me and be told you’re on your own now”* (P5). Additionally, some youth were under the impression that an opportunity existed to purchase these properties in the future, while others expressed confusion as to why they were taken off of social housing lists in the area; *“I didn’t know they’d take me off the housing list, but then they said I can’t buy this. Like in normal council [housing] you can buy after ten years or more or whatever. They [local authority] give you that option to buy it, but then they took me off the council list and then tell me I have it for life, but I can’t buy it? It doesn’t really make sense”* (P3). A lack of control and clarity on the future of the tenancy when it came to desires to travel abroad, family expansion, or purchasing of the property, were echoed by many of the youth.

Life in CAS for Care Leaver Properties

While the first few months in the tenancy were a period of change and transition, the following section goes on to explore life within CAS for Care Leavers properties, the levels of satisfaction with the properties provided and the nature of engagement experienced with PMVT HWS Programme and the wider organisational structures over time.

Description and Levels of Satisfaction with Properties

At the time of interview, the young people had on average occupied their properties for two and a half years, ranging between seven months to almost five years. Overall, the majority of the interviewees were highly satisfied with the quality of the properties provided (n=9), while the rest were moderately satisfied and expressed some minor issues associated with the architecture and layout (n=2). Additionally, all youth expressed high levels of appreciation for the accessibility and fairness of the rental arrangements. An overview of the types, length of time and location of properties, as well as satisfaction levels associated with the location are provided in the table below (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Overview of Participant's Properties and Satisfaction Levels

	Type of Apartment	Time in Property	Location	Location Satisfaction
1	1+ Bed	1 - 2 years	Outside Countryside Town	Satisfied
2	1 Bed	3+ years	Outside Countryside Town	Mod Satisfied
3	1 Bed	2 - 3 years	Suburb	Satisfied
4	1+ Bed	1 - 2 years	Suburb	Satisfied
5	1 Bed	3+ years	Suburb	Satisfied
6	1 Bed	2 - 3 years	Suburb	Not Satisfied
7	1 Bed	3+ years	City Centre	Mod Satisfied
8	1 Bed	3+ years	City Suburb	Mod Satisfied
9	1 Bed	2 - 3 years	Town Centre	Not Satisfied
10	1 Bed	1 - 2 years	City Centre	Satisfied
11	1 Bed	<1 year	City Centre	Satisfied

Quality of CAS Property

Most youth were either satisfied or moderately satisfied with the properties they were relocated to and praised the fully furnished accommodation, which included a bed frame and mattress, coffee table, couch, and television, as well as a fully stocked kitchen. Additionally, all properties had similar layouts, as described by one youth; *"when you open the front door, you enter into the area that is spacious, and the living room and kitchen are combined in this area. Then you move to the hall and the bathroom is on the left and the bedroom is located at the end of the hall which is also spacious and nice"* (P2). When youth were asked whether the property met all their needs, the responses were overwhelmingly positive. The young people indicated that having their own accommodation provided them with consistency and stability. Overall, the prevailing sentiment was that *"as long as you have somewhere to put your head down at the end of the night, that's everything for you"* (P2).

A new living environment additionally provided young people with a sense of ownership, and an opportunity to recreate their own space: *"I never had a proper family home that's mine and now I can look after it and do what I like"* (P8). The importance of making the physical environment feel more like their own private domain was recognized by many of the young people. They would modify their accommodation by changing or relocating furniture, or by adding additional pieces

or decorations: *“Well, it’s one thing that I love doing, you’d see me at 12 o’clock re-arranging my room. Like, because I got a little vision in my head that I want this here...does this look good here or like here? Sorry, decorating my house is definitely one of the best feelings and actually having your own things, I love that aspect”* (P2). Making decisions about their living space was more than just adding a personal aesthetic or preference, these decisions played an important role in the sense of independence, security, and belongingness.

Location of CAS Property

Building from here, the conversation flowed to discuss the location of their properties. In terms of where properties were situated, there was a mix of locations (see Table 5.1). The interview process illuminated the benefits and disadvantages of residing in these locations for young individuals and it shed light on how these factors influenced their housing stability journeys.

Of those who appreciated the property location, a wide variety of rationales were provided. These included proximity to community amenities, family, friends and public transport; *“Everything that I need is at my feet”* (P7), and *“I don’t need to go far, my school is there, my friends and gym”* (P8). The ease of access in engaging with gyms, social networks and public transport facilitated opportunities for youth to integrate into the local communities. A noted advantage was also pre-existing familiarity with the area, and the proximity to old residential services; *“Literally, one of the first residential houses was literally down the road from me, so I know this place in my mind”* (P3). A prior history in the community gave some individuals a deeper sense of belonging and an enhanced support network within the locality; *“It’s great, even to this day I can drop around and just still go in and have a cup of tea with them”* (P11).

However, while the proximity to friends and some relatives was seen as a positive, a small minority (n=2) felt that living in an area that they are originally from significantly impeded their abilities to establish a stable and independent environment for themselves; *“I kind of regret it now, I’d rather be out of [location name] because it’s a shithole to be honest. I’m trying to get away from all that...trying to get away from all the drugs or certain people”* (P6). It was added that people in the area could also be *“really nose, and they know my family and I don’t like that”* (P9). While pre-existing connections within a community proved beneficial for most, managing these relationships in the area was also seen as a challenge that could potentially affect the stability of their independent housing situation.

Property Rent

Despite variations in employment status, the rental payments were tailored to the individual and adjusted to the respective youth’s income. Significantly, when employment status and income levels changed, property rent was also rapidly adjusted to address immediate financial needs; *“I was working and then I moved to [a] part-time job. You know I work maybe two days, three days, sometimes a week and then they [PMVT] dropped it [property rent] down”* (P10). While in the initial stages of moving into properties, youth spoke of struggling and learning how to balance their income and finances, the flexibility and affordability of rent offered a sense of financial security; *“I think being here, the rent is very low, it’s great. I can save money, you can get good jobs, keep saving”* (P5). The rent at the time of interviews varied from €30 to €78 a week and everyone interviewed seemed satisfied and comfortable with the amount of rent they had to pay; *“I feel like compared to the whole world at the moment, I can’t complain. So, I’m just happy with my rent”* (P3).

Types of Support Provided by PMVT

Within this next section, the experiences and nature of youth interaction with active PMVT supports provided are discussed. How youth perceive these supports, the types of support they are provided with and the recommendations they have to enhance PMVT service provision are illuminated. For young people who were confident living independently at the time of the interview little to no support outside of property maintenance was required. Nevertheless, individuals with complex needs or those who had recently transitioned into their properties required higher levels and a variety of social, emotional and practical supports.

Tenancy Support

When it came to a variety of practical tenancy-related supports, youth highlighted a wide range of administrative and property maintenance tasks with which they requested and were supported with. Overall, youth recognised the CAS housing officer's ability to effectively contribute to meaningful administrative duties in support of managing finances and utility bills, applying for Irish citizenship, medical cards, or passports to name a few examples. *"I feel like if I needed anything, I could ring [CAS housing officer] and they would straight away sort it out for me"* (P4). While youth highlighted the effectiveness and tailored care provided by their housing officer, this was juxtaposed by the wider organisational issues some experienced in maintaining their properties.

While all the young people expressed satisfaction with the day-to-day support provided by their CAS housing officer, there were mixed views on access to wider organisational tenancy support, specifically when it came to requesting and having maintenance works completed on their property. There was a wide range of waiting times for maintenance works to be completed across a wide range of tasks where; *"my dishwasher wasn't working a few weeks ago and I rang and said, 'my dishwasher is not working'...straight away fixed, the day after"* (P4). However, in comparison, another youth highlights that they had been waiting over two years to have their back door fixed. While it is mentioned that COVID-19 may have created delays and a backlog of maintenance requests across the organisation, it was felt that *"just sometimes when you ask for things to be fixed, it's very long"* (P3). As a result, a wide range of satisfaction levels with maintenance supports were reported and while some expressed that *"if you need help with the apartment, they're there for you"* (P6), others were "properly fed up" (P3) with having to constantly ask and wait for property maintenance to be carried out.

Social Support

Nonetheless, the youth did however emphasise that they highly valued the support offered in managing periods of isolation and loneliness especially from their assigned CAS housing officer. In particular, they valued the ability to reach out to the CAS housing officer whenever necessary; *"...we don't talk but when I text [CAS housing officer], they come"* (P10) and while not all youth received frequent in-person meetings, there was a collective appreciation of the regular calls or text communications initiated by the CAS housing officer; *"you know, they're [CAS housing officer] just seeing how I'm getting, you know, having a little talk, basically check-in, stuff like that"* (P1). Others emphasised how they had organised regular in-person engagements with their housing officer which would support their well-being; *"Just from the mental health, I suffer with depression quite bad. So, I've learned to try and reign that in over the years. So, having [CAS housing officer] to talk to, it's always great"* (P2). The option to request a visit or engage with the CAS housing officer is a central feature of the support system provided and while some youth needed little to no social support, a few appreciated someone occasionally popping over for a chat and a cup of tea. These meetings also offered the opportunity and space for young people to engage in meaningful conversations and request additional support if they desired.

Another aspect of support provided by CAS housing officers was engaging with resources in the surrounding community such as gyms or educational courses. As the young people developed relationships with their CAS housing officer, enhanced tailored supports to suit their needs were offered. It is highlighted that “[CAS Housing officer] is really like, you know, helpful and helping and, you know, getting all this information like providing that help, and it’s just kind of getting, like I like the fact that I have their help or support if I need it, you know” (P7). Especially where there were higher levels of psychosocial support needed, the strong bonds of trust they had developed with their CAS housing officer supported youth to engage with required additional social and health services. One young person, for example, expressed how important their CAS housing officer was in supporting them to re-engage with addiction support services. The CAS housing officer “was coming to visit me when I was in hospital” and “when I came back from treatment [CAS housing officer] got me a telly” (P9). This social support exceeded the required contractual provision of services that CAS housing officers were obliged to provide, and youth with high levels of need felt they were supported in engaging with additional services through the strong relationships and care they experienced from their CAS housing officer.

Future Planning and Preparation

By facilitating access to housing, the CAS for Care Leavers funding in conjunction with PMVT support provided care leavers the security to start looking towards the future; “I could never plan to the future because I didn’t know where I was going to be, what was going to happen. So, I had the security, it was like a foundation to build from. Yeah, without it I don’t know where I’d be. I don’t know what I’d be doing” (P5). For some youth, this model of care offered the opportunity to start planning small steps, whether that be in recovery, educational courses, or employment; “Well, for the future hopefully I can get myself hopefully, I can get myself a job of whatever I can get” (P1). While for those in more consistent employment and education, CAS offered the stability to look at the next stages of their lives regarding travelling, employment possibilities, educational transitions, or expanding their families; “In five years, I would probably be married... I would have a different job and I think I would be involved in even owning [a] few businesses around town” (P10). The consistency and security of housing combined with the reliability of their CAS housing officer provided some youth with the opportunity to start thinking and planning towards optimistic futures.

Perceptions of Peter McVerry Trust Services and Support Systems

Following on from the previous section, how youth perceive the variety of PMVT supports within the HWS programme and across the organisation is discussed. The main access point for youth engagement with PMVT is mainly through their HWS CAS housing officer, HWS managers and team leaders who also provide out of hours emergency support and ongoing assistance for youth who have complex needs. In cases where the youth have previous experiences with other PMVT services, such as the children’s residential services (n=1), aftercare (n=4), or addiction services (n=1), youth continue to engage with and are offered support alongside their CAS housing officer in HWS.

Youth Centred Engagements

With this in mind, the engagement approach employed across the organisation with the youth was reported to be person-led and -centred, where the level of support provided was influenced by youth voice and recognition of their level of independent living. For example, while some youth were contacted and met in-person weekly, others who were less flexible with their time either due to work, childcare, or education, would have expressed some frustration with meeting in-person. “I told [CAS housing officer], you can ring and text me anytime you know, it’s not

that I don't like you or anything...I literally just don't have the time like to just meet, to just meet and have a chat. You know what I mean?" (P4). For these young people, contact would be made every few months to do a general welfare and property maintenance check-in. The frequency and methods of contact were tailored and continuously adapted to align with each individual young person; *"[CAS housing officer name] leaves it down to me how much support they feel I need, and if there is any more extra support that I need, I feel like I would get it very quickly"* (P2). Depending on the young people's needs either practically with their property or psychosocially, the intensity and frequency of the support provided by the CAS housing officer varied considerably. Whereas for those young people who adapted to living independently, the frequency of engagements would reduce gradually; *"at the start, it was quite often, but now it's not much"* (P3). At the centre of these engagements was the youths expressed needs and choice.

Furthermore, the perceived reliability of their current CAS housing officer contributed meaningfully in various ways to the overall stability of their tenancy. It is important to note that the existing consistency of service provision stands in stark contrast to the previous experiences of some youth, even within the same organisation; *"I think it depends, it's like the aftercare workers, social workers, it depends on the person you get, and I think [CAS housing officer name] is good"* (P5). As a result of involvement with multiple care workers throughout their lives, young people required time to develop trust and establish engagement with their CAS housing officer. *"To have a stranger at the start was good to just shout everything at. So, then obviously over the years you know, growing quite close to [CAS housing officer name], everything just comes out easily now"* (P2). The presence of the same staff member for an extended period, facilitated the development of meaningful relationships and trust, all of which contributed to a sense of security in their tenancy.

Wraparound Network of Staff

Building on the reliability and stability of key staff members, some youth showcased an additional layer of support from PMVT services they had engaged with through childhood and youth. This support provided them with an enhanced sense of social security and belonging. *"...with certain people in the Trust [PMVT], like you get to know people, like you can still ring them and tell them if something did happen. They'd do everything in their power to help you. Like even if they couldn't, they do, they do try to do something"* (P11). Despite turnover among PMVT staff overtime, youth participants felt they could engage and visit the residential and/or aftercare services they availed of in the past whenever they felt the need to; *"they're always so welcoming, they'd never say no"* (P11). The long-term relationship with PMVT services provided an additional layer of both practical and emotional support in the transition and continuity of CAS tenancies. However, it should be noted that this wraparound support from the PMVT child residential services and the aftercare services was only available for youth where pre-existing relationships with PMVT were present.

Some youth spoke of how PMVT members from teams across the organisation would also reach out to them. The additional support was often felt during the transition into the CAS properties including housewarming gifts and celebratory cards, where outreach from PMVT children's residential services and aftercare services was especially felt through periods of heightened vulnerability; *"They [Staff at PMVT Children's Residential Service] all still ring me and ask me how I'm doing and even during Christmas and all, they give me a Christmas card and, you have a big dinner down there during Christmas and they invite everyone that used to live there"* (P11). A snapshot of this level of support is also seen with the addiction support services where *"the manager of [service name] said when I get a year sober, I can volunteer with the gardener doing the gardening around the place and stuff like that...it's brilliant"* (P9). The expansive range of supports and services offered within the organization demonstrated a network of care opportunities across a broad spectrum of specialised services. Consequently, this contributed to an enhanced sense of social security and access to resources, knowledge and support which was not solely dependent on an individual team or staff member.

Summary of Findings for Youth Living in CAS for Care Leaver Properties

The table provided below provides a brief summary of the topics discussed in this chapter (Table 5.2). The key points included the perspectives of youth on accessing a CAS for Care Leaver property, their first engagements with PMVT, an overview of their accommodation and local communities, in addition to the type and perceptions of support provided by PMVT.

Table 5.2 Summary of Findings for Youths Experiences with CAS for Care Leavers

Themes	Subthemes
Accessing a CAS for Care Leaver Property	<p>All youth demonstrated a history of unstable living with moving around within the Irish care system and some youth also highlighting experiences of homelessness.</p> <p>The pathways into CAS funded properties were attributed to the efficacy of Tusla allocated aftercare workers. In comparison to their peers of similar backgrounds, youth also believed that access to these properties was heavily contingent on luck.</p>
First Experiences with PMVT	<p>Coming from a history of instability in living situations, the first time a youth enters the CAS property can be an overwhelming experience, especially when having to sign contracts and tenancy agreements.</p> <p>Ambiguity on the long-term elements of the tenancy have led to feelings of confusion and uncertainty for some youth. Examples include opportunities to purchase properties, desires to travel abroad and family expansion influencing future tenancy sustainment.</p>
Description of Property	<p>Youth valued the high quality and fully furnished properties provided. This contributed to a sense of ownership and belonging.</p> <p>The satisfaction on the location of properties was mixed, nonetheless most valued the accessibility to amenities provided and having a pre-existing relationship with the community.</p> <p>Rental rates were linked to individual income and were considered to be fair and accessible.</p>
Types of Support Provided by PMVT	<p>Youth highlighted a wide range of administrative and property maintenance supports related to tenancy support. However, some youth experienced delays and frustration with wider organisational maintenance waiting times for property repairs.</p> <p>Social support included assistance managing isolation and loneliness and support engaging with community resources, particularly with educational courses and health services. The youth felt able to reach out whenever needed and had confidence in their housing officer's capabilities.</p> <p>In providing housing stability, youth were also supported in future planning and preparation which is something many youth had not explored beforehand. For each youth, this looked different and included recovery, education, or employment.</p>

Table 5.2 Summary of Findings for Youths Experiences with CAS for Care Leavers (Contd)

Themes	Subthemes
Perceptions of PMVT Support Systems	<p>The organisation's youth-centred engagement approach is influenced by youth voices and recognition of their level of independent living. Overtime, the youth developed trusting relationships with their CAS housing officer who adapted the frequency and methods of contact to align with each of the individual's needs.</p> <p>Some youth also benefited from an additional wraparound network of staff across different services. These services provided practical and emotional assistance, enhancing their sense of security and belonging.</p>



Chapter 6:

Findings from PMVT Staff on CAS Service Provision

The following chapter provides an in-depth exploration of key stakeholders' perspectives on the PMVT model of care, how this model is implemented and the challenges to frontline service provision. In total 9 professionals participated in discussions distributed across 3 focus groups. The emerging themes are grouped under 'PMVT Model of Care', 'Nature of Support Provided' and 'Key Challenges'.

PMVT Model of Care

The stakeholders extensively discussed the approach taken when engaging with the care leavers prior to, during the transition and once youth are settled into their properties. Emphasis was made on the importance of a new 'Turn the Key' concept where high quality, fully furnished and fully stocked properties were provided from the very beginning of engagements with the young people. Additionally, the nature of care was focused and tailored to suit the needs of the individual youths and led by their requests.

An Innovative Turn the Key Concept

The significance of providing youth with a high calibre property and preparing them for living independently was showcased as a primary goal across the three focus groups. The purpose of having a property fully furnished and ready to live in was underpinned by the recognition of the vulnerabilities care leavers experienced in their housing journey; *"It just allows the young person to walk in and be able to start fresh immediately, right down to they've got something to have there for dinner"* (D2). The nature of relocating to a new property, and sometimes a new location, comes with a lot of additional challenges to independent living including acquiring essential amenities, food and organizing finances. PMVT staff recognised the limitations placed on youth when trying to relocate and provided additional support to care leavers in this key transitional timeframe. The support provided was reflected through high levels of practical support in home preparation, emotional social support and organizing finances.

All the stakeholders acknowledged the importance of fully supporting the process of transition into CAS properties, by highlighting that *"the beds would be made and the delf in the cupboards, the cutlery is in the drawers, there's toilet roll in the bathroom, there's towels, you know, so we kind of just try to make it as easy as possible for them"* (D2). These practical elements are further enhanced by administrative support across the initial stages of living independently. The PMVT aftercare support and CAS housing officers spoke of helping set up household budgets and a wide variety of accounts including bank accounts, for utilities and standing orders for rent. *"You wouldn't be expecting, you know, the young person at home to be paying the ESB and whatever at 17 or 18. So, why would we really be expecting that our kids are able to do all of those things automatically"* (D3). Through preparing the property and establishing an initial financial framework, emphasis was placed on ensuring that youth would be able to just turn the key to their new properties and begin a new stage of their lives.

Trauma-Informed Care

The initial stages of moving into a property were also identified as heightened periods of instability where identifying the needs and challenges of youth were recognised as a priority.

PMVT staff were aware of youth susceptibility to previous traumas in key time points and emphasised the importance of needing to be trauma-informed throughout this process. Hence, for example; *“we had one young person in particular who transitioned into a CAS property while pregnant. So, it was then trying to identify what support they would need to sustain the placement”* (ACW1). The CAS housing officers recognised that the first year in a property is usually when heightened targeted support is required where; *“she’s [care leaver] been with the service almost 6 months now, so I’m hoping kind of past the year mark, she might settle that we can draw back some of the support, but at the moment she’s three days a week”* (KW2). High levels of awareness on the complexities of youth experiences guided the intensity and level of support provided.

The support provision was focused on the individual needs of the youth and guided by what youth felt was appropriate. It was noted that levels of required social support can change and vary across time, and as a result levels of engagement change; *“we were just looking at the list and... some young people require very little support on a long basis, which is what you would anticipate but that it’s available to step up if need be”* (D3). The nature of the support was person led in that *“it isn’t very structured; it is very needs led, and individualised and individual led”* (ACW2). The emphasis on young people’s well-being and support for independent living appear to be at the core of service provision. Across all three focus groups the frontline staff, management and directors recognised the wide array of youth experiences and therefore tailored the types, and levels of support required; *“if you were to grade them on the low, medium and high level, obviously as young people are going through the property, that’s the time of an increased requirement for support, and that can periodically come up again during their tenancy”* (D3). Identification and recognition of young peoples lived experiences in care and sometimes homelessness guided conscious effort to frequently assess the types and levels of support required across time.

Nature of Support Provided

The core elements of PMVT service provision for youth in the CAS for Care Leavers are based on having a home readily available and a high quality of service provision centered on being trauma-informed and person-led. Building on this framework, the targeted supports available and the nature of implementation are discussed below. This included the work involved in the initial placement of youth, the access to multi-disciplinary support and the nature of direct frontline support. The key challenges to actualising this model of care is also discussed.

Initial Placement Structures

Aside from the responsibilities of the organisation in acquiring and developing properties already mentioned in Chapter 2, the directors and management interviewed for this report also showcased their responsibilities in facilitating the allocation of youth to CAS for Care Leavers properties. They highlighted that the process begins when a youth is identified *“as vulnerable and needing extra support”* (D3) by their assigned Tusla aftercare workers. The case for CAS for Care Leavers housing approval is subsequently put forward and presented to the relevant aftercare steering committee by the assigned Tusla aftercare worker. The purpose of the steering committee is *“to think about what is appropriate for them [youth leaving care] at that point in their journey”* (D3). Alongside local authority representatives, a range of social, health and educational professionals act as *“decision maker”* (D3) on steering committees to determine whether a candidate is suitable for a CAS for Care Leavers property and would have the skills necessary to maintain a tenancy. According to PMVT senior management, youth eligibility for a property is considered as those *“who have complex needs but are able to live independently”* (D3). It is also mentioned that *“all of the young people who are referred through separated*

children seeking international protection would be seen as meeting those requirements" (D1), whereas those who are remaining in foster care or moving into student accommodation would in theory not immediately require the use of a CAS for Care Leavers property. As an approved housing body representative, directors of the organisation would sit on aftercare steering committee's across Ireland where; "for some areas we'll know the young people who are in children's residential care, in other areas we're just working purely as the approved housing body" (D3). The process described by senior management for CAS property allocation highlights how youth gain access to these properties and how PMVT management are involved. Once a candidate is approved and the housing is provided, PMVT management prepare and facilitate the engagement of frontline staff with the youth moving into CAS for Care Leavers properties. Directors and senior management of the organisation guide how frontline staff provide support to youth through ensuring ongoing training and supervision, in addition to reviewing caseloads prior to assigning youth to frontline housing officers; "It's down to the managers and down to myself just to make sure that you know everything is running smoothly and if there are any issues that they [frontline staff] bring it sooner rather than later" (D3). Continuous engagement and communication with the frontline team members was a core focus of supporting service provisions where "it's very, very important that the lines of communication are kept open and staff, you know, in no way feel they're walking this alone" (D1).

Access to Multi-Disciplinary Teams

For youth who had transitioned out of PMVT children's residential services, engaged in PMVT aftercare services, or availed of PMVT stabilisation and detox services, additional internal organisational support was made available. Across the organisation, PMVT provided a continuity of care across time, services and locations, and facilitated an additional resource and support network for youth. The focus groups with PMVT aftercare support professionals explored the importance of continued engagement and the value outreach support played in actualising the PMVT model of care.

All PMVT stakeholders discussed how the organisation supports a continuum of care across services in an attempt to ensure a sense of stability in the youths' lives. One staff member highlights that "*young people going through the care system have a lot of change in their life and a lot of professionals in and out of their lives, and what we've kind of reflected on in the work that we carry out is, you know, if even they have one or two consistent people in their lives that that's going to be the support that they need" (ACW1). Aftercare support staff also recognised that PMVT services and locations may change over time, nonetheless every effort is made to ensure contact for these services is still available and accessible for youth. "It mightn't be the same building, but it will be the same organisation and they will have a point of contact within the aftercare services" (ACW2). Through a trauma-informed approach and embedding continuity of care within this framework, continued support for youth in CAS for care properties is provided, particularly in the key transition into CAS properties.*

The concept of outreach which was embedded in PMVT's ethos of ensuring a continuum of care was also a core focus for staff ensuring that a variety of support is provided in preparation for, and during the transition into CAS for Care Leavers properties. All of which was participant-led and unstructured in nature; it "*could be something as basic as a phone call in the evening time and/or it could be as intensive as going out there several times a week or being in contact face to face and supporting issues that may arise" (ACW2). An aftercare support worker recalls how one youth lived in semi-independent PMVT accommodation for 6-months prior to moving into a CAS property and this allowed for a pre-existing knowledge base of youths lived experiences and a tailored approach to supporting the transition into a CAS property; "...the way that I would have worked with them [in aftercare service], I would try to adapt to that kind of over the phone to the techniques that I would have used while they were living here and adapt that to kind of support them emotionally over the phone that way. And, if I thought there was a need to go*

out and visit them, I would" (ACW3). While the youth began new engagements with their CAS housing officer, the pre-existing relationship with the PMVT aftercare team facilitated a smooth transition into a CAS for Care Leavers property and offered a consistent network of staff.

Frontline Responsibilities

A prevalent topic discussed was the nature of CAS housing officers facilitating the role of a landlord - collecting rents, ensuring property standards are maintained and supporting with property maintenance - in addition to offering social care support, for example, facilitating engagement with physical and mental health service or offering support in accessing community resources. Directors and management highlighted that the ability to manage the property as a landlord provides an extra level of support for care leavers in assuring tenancy sustainment; *"It would seem a bit draconian, but we do have to follow RTB, and we might have to issues, warning and that, but that comes with an extra level of support. What can we do to support this, so we don't have to go down that route of executing and potentially ending somebody's tenancy?"* (D1). However, while it is recognised that supportive tenancy management can provide a strong framework for housing stability, CAS housing officers felt as if; *"...it kind of blurs the line for the participants. They find it really hard to say trust you and allow you to help them and allow you to support them when you're playing both roles"* (KW2). Another CAS housing officer mentioned that they are called the *"the debt collector"* (KW3) by some youths. The realities of playing *"good cop, bad cop"* (KW3) as both landlord and caregiver, shaped the basis of many interactions with youth which CAS housing officers felt impacted their abilities to engage at a meaningful level. While there are benefits for housing stability in frontline staff managing the property, it could potentially serve as a detriment in PMVT staff supporting the development of independent living skills.

All frontline staff, management and directors recognised the importance of supporting the development of independent living for all youths in CAS properties. The desire to provide effective high-quality care and tailored support to every youth was expressed, yet it was felt that the immediate requirements of a smaller number of youths with complex needs and responding to mental health related emergencies were at the forefront of service provision. Staff echoed desires to support all youth in enhancing their skill sets where; *"you need one to one at least twice, three, visits a week of intense work, like bringing them for a coffee, sitting down, doing a CV, bringing them to interview"*(KW1). However, a predominant amount of time is required and dedicated to a small proportion of youth with complex needs and as a result, staff felt that those with less complex needs were not engaged with as often as staff would like; *"I know on, on my end, you just haven't got the time to do it..."* (KW1).

Key Challenges

Although CAS housing officers and aftercare support teams experience various frontline service provision challenges, a common shortage of staff and a broad scope of responsibilities for teams, pose significant obstacles to delivering a participant-led and trauma-informed approach.

Lack of Infrastructure

As the nature of the PMVT model of care was explained to focus on providing a trauma-informed, long-term and tailored support system, the lack of staff available was believed to impact the effective actualisation of this framework. Due to limited staff and funding available for additional positions, the aftercare support team highlighted that due to an absence of a designated outreach team or singular assigned outreach worker for CAS youth, all aftercare support teams incorporate additional and constant outreach into their workload. *"We do have cases, several months on where they [CAS Participants] would be contacted still every single day in the evening time"* (ACW2) and as a result, *"...the aftercare workers are struggling because of their caseloads to be able to give young people in CAS properties that time..."*

(ACW1). Although all CAS housing officers agreed that *“it was just lack of bodies around the place that if an emergency was to happen...that somebody else would be able to present down”* (KW2) frontline and management disclosed difficulties in achieving this goal *“trying to get staff sometimes isn’t the easiest”* (KW2).

In addition, youth accommodated in CAS for Care Leavers properties across counties created obstacles to providing effective and efficient support. It was universally expressed that significant challenges existed in team units being responsible for youth across multiple counties. The ability to spend meaningful and quality time with youths was felt to be severely impacted by the long distances, and time spent travelling across counties to meet youth; *“...for the level of support that’s needed on my caseload is so unrealistic, especially with how far away everyone is”* (KW3). While a strong drive and motivation to support all youth and provide consistent care at all levels was prevalent amongst the frontline staff, the intense demands of the role and large distances between the locations of young people meant that staff levels of engagement and relationships with young people in CAS for care properties were felt to be limited. *“It’s hard being on the ground, you know, dealing with everything going on, getting phone calls, emails... it’s borderline impossible”* (KW1).

While the high demand from a smaller number of youths was a prevalent theme across all focus groups, the lack of staff and available resources significantly impeded PMVT staff abilities to offer the highest quality of care and support. These barriers and challenges impacted PMVT frontline aftercare and housing officers ability to actualise this innovative Turn the Key concept and provide trauma-informed support as per this model. However, from a wider societal perspective senior management recognise the improvements that have been made in this sector across time; *“I started in children’s services in 1998. So, to be able to talk about young people being handed a key to a property that is theirs with the level of work that we have, that’s a huge achievement”* (D3). Following experiences of State care, to support young people to feel socially included in society and live independently, high quality properties are being provided, and recognition of challenges to social care service provision showcase the areas for targeted intervention and further support.

Summary of Findings for Internal Stakeholders Focus Group

The table provided below provides a brief summary of the key point discussed within each theme across the 3 separate focus groups (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Summary of Results from PMVT Internal Stakeholder Focus Groups

Theme	Key Points
1. PMVT Model of Care	<p>Turn the Key concept - In order to support the transition into independent living and a new stage in youths' housing journeys, PMVT provides a fully furnished and stocked property and offers support in setting up accounts, utility bills and budgeting.</p> <p>Trauma-informed - Recognising that journeys to CAS properties vary and crises may happen at any time, individual and participant-led support is provided for youth in CAS properties in a long-term and participant-led manner.</p>
2. Nature of PMVT Support Provided	<p>PMVT Aftercare Support Workers - act as an insider knowledge base and support framework for the transition into CAS properties. They additionally continue sustained outreach indefinitely.</p> <p>PMVT CAS Housing Officers - are the main contact point and support network within the organisation. They act as dual landlord and caregivers for youths in CAS properties and their time is predominantly dedicated to high levels of emergency response for a small proportion of youths with multiple complex needs.</p> <p>PMVT Directors and Senior Management - sit on aftercare steering committee's as representatives of the approved housing body and housing facilitator. Frontline staff structure and guidance is provided through supervision, training and communication.</p>
3. Key Challenges	<p>Limited Staffing Levels - Across all aftercare and CAS frontline services, low staffing levels impact the intensity of staff workloads. Challenges exist in the aftercare ability to provide long-term outreach and CAS housing officers' abilities to meaningfully engage with youth not in crises.</p> <p>Limited Infrastructure - Team units or hubs covering wide ranging geographical areas impact the amount of time staff can engage with youth.</p>

Chapter 7: Discussion

This report explored the lived experiences of youth in CAS for Care Leaver funded properties and their experiences engaging with PMVT services. Eleven youth living in the properties for over 6 months or more were interviewed in their homes. They shared insight into their lives which included accessing, and living in the properties, in addition to availing of services offered by PMVT. A window into service provision was also provided by the PMVT staff members working to ensure property management and psychosocial support where required. PMVT staff members included housing officers, aftercare support workers and senior management representatives.

As an Irish government funding scheme, CAS provides AHBs the opportunity to acquire properties in support of housing vulnerable groups in long-term and stable accommodation. One of the several funding streams focuses on providing properties to young people with a history of care and who are vulnerable to experiencing homelessness. As an AHB, PMVT acquires housing, project manages additional construction and operates an innovative 'Turn the Key Concept' which ensures that properties are fully equipped with basic furniture and amenities prior to youth moving in ². To subsequently gain access to these properties, all youth spoke on the efficacy of their Tusla assigned aftercare workers in referring their cases to Tusla aftercare steering committees. The youth who gained access to CAS properties reported having a wide variety of social, practical and emotional support needs, which ranged from requiring minimal assistance to having multiple complex needs. As such, access to CAS for Care Leavers properties did not appear to be standardised or uniform in the approach applied to allocating properties and assessing youth needs. This may reflect the individualisation of the access process which is very positive and reflects a caring ethic. At the same time and however altruistic the intention, the importance of clarity in how youth gain access to these properties needs to be provided.

Nonetheless, the retention rates for the PMVT tenancies indicated long-term stability for the majority of the youths availing of this housing scheme and PMVT services. Youth benefiting from the CAS for Care Leavers also came from a wide range of previous housing situations; some youth came from aftercare services, semi-independent living and student accommodation, while others also shared a variety of previous homelessness experiences resulting from foster care, family or private rental market breakdowns. As such, the availability of housing through the CAS for Care Leavers can act as both a preventative and informal intervention for preventing youth homelessness.

Youth Experiences with PMVT

Discussions with youth revealed that the HWS programme was the primary point of service provision and the CAS housing officer was the main person of contact. Satisfaction with services provided by PMVT also appeared to be closely linked to the stability of engagement with their current CAS housing officer. Yet, for those who had pre-existing engagements with PMVT services or required additional support, a multi-layered wraparound of staff engagement was available. Wraparound support included staff engagement from PMVTs' children's residential centres, aftercare and addiction support services. It was understood that having multiple staff across different services, ensured the continuity of care and contributed to enhancing tenancy stability. Especially during times of heightened vulnerability and loneliness (such as birthdays and Christmas), youth expressed how valuable it was to have people reaching out to them. Youth praised and highly valued their relationships with PMVT staff and the provision of wraparound support contributed to an enhanced sense of stability in their current tenancies.

² Due to a restructuring of service provision, the organisation is no longer in a position to absorb this cost.

All youth highly valued the quality of their property and location, praising the property amenities, as well as the opportunity to live independently. However, during the initial transition into the CAS properties heightened periods of vulnerability were identified, where youth expressed feelings of loneliness and isolation. The first day was often marked with meeting new support staff and (for most) seeing the property for the very first time. As a result this led to challenges in being able to navigate and engage with the tenancy agreement. However, once youth settled into their properties and had space for introspection, concerns arose regarding a lack of clarity on the long-term future of the tenancy. Young individuals echoed uncertainty regarding the stability of their tenancy if their families were to expand, or if they were to go abroad for a year. While some youth also expressed desire for home ownership. There was a prevailing perception that a greater transparency was needed on the long-term elements involved with the CAS and PMVT tenancy agreements. While the initial transition into CAS properties was identified as a period of heightened vulnerability for young individuals, having a place to call home and receiving targeted support from PMVT allowed youth to grow. This support guided the transition into independent living.

For most youth, the highest levels of support was required pre- and during the transition into CAS properties. This was offered by CAS housing officers and also aftercare support workers. Although the levels of engagement with staff reduced over time, youth with multiple complex needs continued to have sustained engagement with staff through frequent in-person meetings where companionship and strong bonds of trust were fostered. In comparison, those who required little to no support (other than property management) engaged with PMVT occasionally every few months. The time, dedication, and companionship offered were greatly appreciated. Maintenance issues and delays were highlighted; however frustrations were not directed towards the housing officers but rather the wider organisational maintenance system. Youth felt that PMVT staff, particularly the CAS housing officer, provided adaptable and flexible care when required.

The most common types of support offered were regarding tenancy, social adaptation and preparation for the future steps (mainly in the areas of education and employment). While some youths spoke of taking on short-term, temporary or part-time work, 7 out of 11 of the youth were unemployed at the time of their interviews. Aspirations for further education and training were evident, however, 50% of youth enrolled for September 2023, did not start their associated courses. This occurred due to failure in course recruitment and personal circumstances. While PMVT incorporates a comprehensive employment and educational support framework, both staff and youth emphasised the necessity for additional measures to ensure the accessibility of these supports to youth accommodated in CAS properties. Considering that the PMVT model of care has a great potential to support and enhance the social inclusion of youth, increased and sustained engagement with education and employment is necessary. The provision of targeted support could empower youth to take the next step towards becoming active and fully included members of society.

Peter McVerry Trust Frontline and Management Service Provision

From a service provision perspective, all frontline staff members and management emphasised the importance of understanding and recognising the impact pre-existing traumas have on care leaver youths' abilities to firstly, transition into independent living and secondly, engage in additional supports they may require. The process of moving into a new property for youth who have experience of residential or foster care is a significant change and can be a period of heightened vulnerability. Therefore, it was a priority for PMVT to provide a fully furnished and stocked property on the first day of the tenancy. Combined with initial administrative support, emphasis was placed on addressing the logistical and additional financial barriers to independent living when transitioning into new properties. The implementation of this new and innovative turn the key framework by PMVT is instrumental in supporting tenancy stability from the moment a youth enters the property. By providing furniture, food and amenities, the potential stress (or even breakdown) for the youth occupants when navigating the transition into independent living can be mitigated.

Additionally, PMVT offer a wide range of medical and social supports across the organisation and this inter-disciplinary knowledge and practical support is available to any individual engaging with PMVT services. Where youth in this study have availed of the children's residential centres, aftercare and addiction day and residential support services. Continued outreach from these services offers a multi-layered engagement and long-term wraparound support system within PMVT for the youth living in CAS for Care properties. With the intention of supporting CAS tenancy sustainment and housing stability, a wraparound framework provides a consistent network of care across a wide range of trained staff and services. This support is predominantly achieved through inter-disciplinary knowledge, and a spirit of organisational and personal altruism, which is reflective of the ethos of PMVT and embodied in practise.

All youth expressed feeling highly supported, heard and respected by the PMVT frontline teams. Nonetheless, while staff wanted to supported all youth with their individual needs, significant time was required towards responding to emergencies and providing high intensity support for youth with multiple complex needs. The perceived dual role of the providing care support and acting as a landlord was also felt to impact relationship building capacities with youth. Due to the multiple competing responsibilities and priorities of frontline staff, additional funding and expansion of the CAS team units would improve the level of support available to scaffold youths' transition into properties. This could enhance social inclusion and ensure property maintenance procedures are clear, transparent and efficient. A consistent multi-disciplinary team including the involvement of peer support specialists, housing officers and social support workers would enhance the existing support frameworks in actualising youths' potential towards social integration.

Young Peoples Social Inclusion and Voice

From the youths' perspective, the provision of a property and the form of care provided, facilitated the opportunity to commence planning optimistic futures. Many youth spoke of wanting to build relationships and families, go into education and find employment. The properties, accessible rent, and tailored support offered by PMVT provided young people a stable base from which to grow. While for some that meant small steps towards more positive behaviours, others saw this as an opportunity to build and establish a strong future for themselves. While further infrastructural attention and targeted intervention needs to be drawn towards supporting and sustaining education and employment, the CAS for Care Leavers and PMVT involvement offers youth an opportunity to start becoming included members of society through the provision of stable housing.



Chapter 8: Recommendations

Housing Development, Property Acquisition and Participant Allocation

Recommendation 1: Support in funding a new and innovative Turn the Key Concept

By expanding on the existing CAS funding structure and integrating a continuous funding stream to furnish properties with basic supplies and amenities, the heightened period of vulnerability youth may experience in transitioning into CAS for Care Leaver properties can be mitigated. This continuous stream of funding is needed to apply a new and innovative turn the key concept where these supplies are provided prior to youth moving into the properties and so that it is not just properties provided to youth, but homes.

Recommendation 2: CAS Housing Regulations Guidebook

The youth highlighted multiple future plans in which a lack of transparency on their tenancy agreements has impacted their potentials for growth. Youth plans often revolved around anticipation for co-habiting partners, family growth, working abroad for an extended period of time, or prospects of home ownership. As the CAS for Care Leavers is an evolving and expanding framework, the development of a universal CAS Housing Regulations Guidebook that sets standards for all AHBs, would provide additional clarity to the AHBs and youth involved in the scheme on how diverse circumstances should be addressed. This could enhance young people's sense of security in their tenancies, help them build meaningful relationships and support them to explore and grow.

Recommendation 3: Clarity on Access Opportunities for CAS Housing

Youth involved in this project demonstrated a wide range of individualised access routes and levels of support needs required. These ranged from multiple and complex to requiring little to no support from PMVT. Clarity on who, how and why youth gain access to these properties from the relevant authorities could provide insight into ensuring youth who are in urgent need of these properties are prioritised.

Recommendation 4: Automatic review of Care Leaver Housing Needs - Re-Assessment on a yearly basis

While there is a limited availability of housing, youth leaving care continue to be at increased risk of experiencing homelessness. An annual review on the need for housing for these youth up to 23, would promote a sense of transparency of access to Cas for Care Leavers housing. Additionally, with the hope of housing stock gradually increasing in this scheme, we can better address the housing needs of vulnerable youth.

Recommendation 5: Further Research into Homeownership Support Pathways for Youth in CAS Properties

For some young people in CAS properties, uncertainty existed about whether they owned these properties, while other youth recognised that they did not own the properties, but had a strong desire for home ownership in the future. A further exploration and development of support pathways into homeownership of a future property is needed to ensure that the expressed

needs of youth are heard and for those that would like to progress out of CAS properties, that the progression pathways from CAS properties can be strengthened and enhanced.

Peter McVerry Trust Service Provision – Focusing on Young People’s Social Inclusion and Voice

Recommendation 6: Expanding Multi-Disciplinary Teams – A Housing Officer, Social Support Worker, Peer Support Worker

For youth with multiple complex needs engaging with PMVT, high levels of consistent support are required from PMVT. Additionally, youth continue to experience periods in which additional social support is required to ensure tenancy sustainability throughout their time in the properties. Nonetheless for frontline staff, managing both the practical tenancy responsibilities can be a barrier for building supportive relationships with youth. A funded long-term multi-disciplinary team that divides the current responsibilities of a CAS housing officer could potentially facilitate this. The optimum team dynamic would include a CAS Social Support Worker, Housing Officer (to oversee Maintenance and Rents) and a Peer Support Worker (to support in the initial CAS housing transition in addressing isolation and loneliness). This may enhance PMVT ability to build meaningful relationships and support youth engage with wider community resources.

Recommendation 7: Plain English Accessible Tenancy Agreement and an Embedded Cooling-Off Period

For PMVT service provision, it is recommended that a tenancy agreement created in plain English, in collaboration with youth would strengthen engagement and understanding on the practicalities of the tenancy. This would ensure all information including rules and responsibilities are clear, fair, easily understood, and embraced. Provision of the plain English tenancy agreement a week prior to the start of a tenancy, could also enhance opportunities for youth to review, engage, and raise any concerns around their tenancy.

From the findings of this report, specific areas to consider including are:

- 1) A greater clarity on the responsibilities of the youth and AHB on property maintenance, estate management and pet policies
- 2) Information on property ownership and social housing list engagement
- 3) Accessible Resources and Services available from the AHB

Recommendation 8: An Online Maintenance Portal for Transparency and Accountability on Maintenance Procedure

As property maintenance is a service that all youth availing of CAS funded properties will access through PMVT. Youth expressed that a standardised follow-up framework for maintenance would facilitate a clear, transparent and accountable maintenance procedure. An online portal accessible to all youth and staff provides an opportunity for this process to be streamlined, while a maximum time-limit of 28 days for ensuring a request is acted and followed up on is also advised.

Recommendation 9: Targeted Focus on Education and Employment Support and Staff Training

Within PMVT service provision, an opportunity exists to establish a long-term and sustained focus on supporting educational development and providing employment support. During the interviews, the unemployed youth disclosed desire to engage in stable work, and re-engage with education. Within a funded multi-disciplinary team, providing further training of the CAS Social Support Worker on community education and employment opportunities would further aid youth to integrate into the education and employment sectors of society.



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