

Heather Dear,
Project Manager
IPart OOHC Review

Dear Heather,

I have been the primary carer for my two grandchildren for the past 16 years in my role as a Grandparent Kinship Carer. Due to the significant and ongoing high needs of both children, I have been unable to maintain employment during this time. As a result, I have relied heavily on my personal superannuation savings to support their upbringing.

I have recently transitioned to receiving the Age Pension. However, with both of my grandchildren continuing their education through to Year 12, the reduction in their financial support upon turning 16 presents a serious and unfair burden on my already limited resources. The decrease in their allowance not only undermines their ability to remain in full-time education without financial strain but also directly impacts my capacity to meet their essential needs without further depleting my retirement savings.

I respectfully urge the Department to reconsider the policy that reduces care allowances at such a critical stage in a young person's educational journey, particularly in cases involving Kinship Carers who have already made considerable financial and personal sacrifices.

Helping a 16-year-old transition into adulthood and become a contributing member of the community involves a mix of financial costs, emotional support, and access to opportunities. Here's a breakdown of what they may need, especially in terms of education and personal development:

1. Education-Related Needs

Costs:

High school expenses (if still attending): supplies, clothes, lunch, fees for sports or clubs.

If living away from home at a boarding school. Travel and boarding costs.

Tutoring or extra classes: if struggling or aiming for higher education.

Standardized tests: prep and registration (if applicable).

College or trade school planning: application fees, campus visits, test prep.

Post-secondary tuition: college, community college, or vocational training programs.

Support:

Help exploring different paths: university, trade school, apprenticeships, or workforce.

Guidance with financial aid, scholarships, or grants.

Encouragement and mentoring for career interests.

2. Life Skills Development

Costs:

Driver's education: classes and licensing fees.

Transportation: bus pass, bicycle, or saving for a car.

Basic supplies: phone, clothing, hygiene products.

Support:

Teaching budgeting, time management, cooking, cleaning, and basic first aid.

Help opening a bank account and understanding saving, spending, and credit.

Encouraging part-time work or volunteer opportunities for experience.

3. Social & Community Involvement

Costs:

Membership or participation fees for clubs, sports, church/youth groups, or other community programs.

Support:

Encouraging them to volunteer, mentor younger kids, or take leadership roles.

Introducing them to civic engagement (voting, community meetings, etc.).

4. Emotional & Mental Health

Costs:

Counseling or therapy if needed.

Medical cost for GP (at 16 Medicare card - no bulk billing.)

Programs for emotional resilience or mentorship (some are free).

Support:

Open, non-judgmental conversations about stress, relationships, and identity.

Safe space to grow and express themselves.

Summary Checklist:

Area	Cost Example	Support Needed
Education	Tuition, supplies, test fees	College/career guidance, tutoring
Life Skills	Driver's ed, phone, hygiene	Budgeting, job search, time management
Community	Club fees, transportation	Volunteering, leadership opportunities
Mental Health	Therapy (if needed)	Listening, emotional support
Medical	GP no bulk billing	Health diet and lifestyle

Key Issues:

\$300 reduction in total support when the child turns 16, despite ongoing high school attendance.

Mutually exclusive benefits: Cannot receive both Youth Allowance and Family Tax Benefit.

Disincentive to continue education: Financial drop may discourage youth from staying in school.

Implications:

Carers may struggle to cover costs with reduced support.

Youth in care may feel pressured to work prematurely or leave school.

Policy misalignment with government goals to encourage Year 12 completion and long-term independence.

To: Subject: Financial Disadvantage for 16-Year-Olds in OOHC – Youth Allowance and Education Support. DCJ NSW

I am writing to raise a concern regarding the reduction in financial support provided to young people in Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) when they turn 16 years old, particularly in relation to their continued participation in education.

At 15 years of age, a young person in OOHC receives a care allowance of approximately **\$880** per fortnight, with their carer receiving the Family Tax Benefit (FTB) of **\$277**, totaling **\$1,157** in combined support. However, upon turning 16, the young person's care allowance is reduced to **\$550 per fortnight**. They are then required to choose between applying for Youth Allowance (bringing their total to approximately **\$850 per fortnight**) or continuing under their carer's Family Tax Benefit (totaling approximately **\$827 per fortnight**).

This change occurs even if the young person remains in full-time high school and intends to complete Year 12. It not only creates financial strain for both the young person and their carer, but it also sends a discouraging message about continuing education. The reduced funding may force some young people to consider dropping out of school or seeking employment prematurely to make up for the shortfall.

I urge the Department to review this policy in the interest of educational attainment, stability, and well-being for young people in care. Continued full support through Year 12 would be a vital step toward achieving better long-term outcomes and aligning with the Department's objectives for youth development and education.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I welcome the opportunity to discuss possible solutions or participate in policy consultations.

Sincerely,

Merle Dyer

