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MEDIA RELEASE

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CHILD PROTECTION IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS – ESPECIALLY GOVERNMENT

CREATE Foundation CEO, Ms Jacqui Reed, questions the major parties' commitment to keeping children safe. Child protection is everybody's business and most of all the responsibility of our country's decision makers.

Every child, irrespective of who they are or where they live deserves to live in a safe and supportive environment, free from harm and neglect. Unfortunately, this is not the case for many Australian children and young people with over 40,000 living in out-of-home care.

CREATE Foundation is Australia's peak consumer advocate working to empower children and young people with an out-of-home care experience (i.e. foster, kinship or residential care). CREATE supports those with a care experience sharing their insights and improving services and life outcomes for some of Australia's most vulnerable young people.

Ms Reed said that with only 12 days until the federal election the Government, the Coalition and the Greens have remained silent on the challenging issues of protecting Australia's children and young people in care.

In 2009, the Council of Australian Government's 2009 endorsed the "National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020". The National Framework is the first time the Australian, state and territory governments have committed to a collaborative effort to keep Australia's children safe.

Ms Reed said that although there had been some positive outcomes in the first three years of the National Framework there was a long way to go.

"I am calling on the major parties to publicly outline their plan for how they will work to ensure the safety and wellbeing of some of Australia's most vulnerable children," said Ms Reed.

Of particular concern to CREATE Foundation is the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in statutory care. Ms Reed said that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are 10 times more likely to be in a form of care than non-Indigenous children.

18 year old young adults leaving care is another area of grave concern with only 33% of young people transitioning to independence being aware of their *leaving care plan* – a plan for their future. In 2009, CREATE Foundation's independent Report Card surveyed 471 young

people who had left care with 35% indicating they experienced homelessness in the first year of leaving care.

As the national peak body working to empower the voices of children and young people and give and give them a say about the decisions that impact their lives daily, CREATE Foundation calls on the major parties to commit to an external independent National Children's Survey as agreed to by all governments in 2009.

Despite decades of tireless work to improve the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in care, their right to be heard and provide insight into the system designed to protect them remains limited.

"The measurement of a system mustn't be based on statistics alone," stated Ms Reed.

"It is equally important not to rely entirely on governments reporting their own achievements."

"What is clearly needed is an independent, balanced view which includes the opinions of care recipients. The safety and wellbeing of kids in care must always be the paramount concern."

CREATE Foundation acknowledges that protecting Australia's children and young people in care is a state responsibility, however when the lives of many young people continue to be placed at risk, CREATE emphatically states that a national response is required.

Ms Reed said that *"Through no fault of their own, children and young people are placed in care because of neglect or abuse. They experience social isolation, stigma and chronic low self-esteem. They feel unconnected, disempowered and unable to do anything about it."*

CREATE Foundation is the peak consumer body for children and young people in care. We are a not-for-profit organisation connecting and empowering children and young people in care and improving the care system through activities, programs, training and policy advice. Learn more at www.create.org.au

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Data source: McDowall, J.J. (2009). CREATE Report Card 2009 – Transitioning from Care: Tracking Progress. Sydney: CREATE Foundation.