



Consultation Report for “Pathways of Care” Survey for  
the longitudinal study of children and young people in  
out-of-home care.

June 2011

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## Consultation Report for “Pathways of Care” Survey for the longitudinal study of children and young people in out-of-home care

### Context:

The CREATE Foundation (CREATE) is a not for profit organisation funded in New South Wales (NSW) as the peak body for children and young people in out-of-home care. CREATE’s mission is to create a better life for children and young people in care (CYPIC). CREATE does this through:

- *Connecting* children and young people to each other, CREATE and their Community.
- *Empowering* children and young people to build self-confidence, self-esteem, and skills that enable them to have a voice and be heard.
- *Changing* the care system, in consultation with children and young people, through advocacy to improve policies, practices and services, and increase community awareness.

CREATE Foundation in NSW receives funding from the Department of Human Services, Community Services (CS). As part of the service specifications of this project, CREATE has a role in assisting CS to consult with children and young people in care about issues that affect them.

During 2010 CREATE and CS had two meetings and a number of discussions about Pathways of Care, the longitudinal study of CYP in OOHC in NSW, and the participation of CYPIC in the study. CS staff stated that the study design could benefit from direct input by CYPIC during the design phase. On 14<sup>th</sup> January 2011 CS and CREATE staff met to discuss ways in which this direct input could occur via consultation sessions led by CREATE.

### Scope of the Study:

It was agreed that a consultation process with young people, focussing on their opinions about participating in research and their ideas for making this study a success, would provide valuable information for the Pathways of Care research team. The consultations would provide an opportunity to pilot material for use when interviewing CYPIC.

The consultations initially focussed on the following four areas:

1. The interview process and how to make it an enjoyable experience for the CYP without causing any anxiety.
2. What results would individual CYP want and what would they want for future study participants.
3. Strategies to keep CYP engaged in the longitudinal research process to ensure consistency of data.

4. Identifying the information required from CYPIC that can't be obtained in other ways such as from administrative records.

These four areas were later modified by the Pathways of Care research team to cover the following three areas:

1. Methodology:

- Age to interview
- How to collect the data
- Length of interviews
- How to recruit CYP to the study
- How to keep CYP in the study – incentives
- Strategies for providing feedback, results and keeping in touch
- Best way to support CYP post interviews
- Confidentiality
- Location of interview - at home or other

2. Brainstorming issues for CYPIC:

- What are important things for CYP to tell about their care experiences including entering care and their time in care
- Safety
- Permanency/ felt security and connectedness
- Wellbeing and development

3. Feedback on a draft questionnaire:

- Priority of questions
- Sensitivity of questions
- Identification of questions as they relate to the CYP's developmental stages
- Any gaps in the identification of possible issues
- Identify language that is confusing or jargonistic

These three areas guided the development of the consultation, outlined below in the process and methodology section.

## Process and methodology:

CREATE originally proposed that there be two consultation groups, each with up to 10 participants aged 12-17 and 18-25 years of age in each group and a consultation process of two hours duration. CREATE drafted a series of activities, questions and prompts to be used during the sessions. CS staff provided input to the draft before the format of the sessions were finalised. Consultation sessions were structured in a way that encouraged young people to be comfortable and confident to

participate. It was also established that participants would be given a \$30 WISH gift card as recognition of their contribution on the day.

This age range was selected because it allowed for representation of young people at varying stages of their pathway in care, and also allowed young people who have exited care to share insights about how to best engage and retain older study participants.

During recruitment of participants for the consultations, several barriers were identified in arranging for children and young people to present to an unfamiliar venue with unfamiliar peers. In consultation with CS staff, it was agreed that phone consultations – where children and young people would feel safe and comfortable to express themselves freely – were an option which reduced the barriers of a group consultation. This proved highly effective and had the added benefit of a more diverse range of participants across regions.

Carers or departmental caseworkers were required to complete a consent form for children under 18 years of age to participate in a session. Children and young people were also asked to give informed consent about their involvement before the consultations began. It was reinforced that their involvement was voluntary and the privacy provisions and restrictions relating to the consultation were outlined.

This report includes:

- Relevant information about the participants' demographics
- Recommendations based on the young people's feedback
- The results of the consultations in a summarised report.

Individual children and young people have not been identified in this report. CREATE will provide information back to each of the participants outlining the findings of the consultations and the recommendations made by CREATE.

## Results and discussion:

Results from this consultation are a combination of notes taken by staff during a group consultation with three young people, written results from 17 young people who were consulted on the phone and a hard copy survey completed by one young person. As previously noted, phone consultations were arranged to overcome barriers that impeded the participation of children and young people in unfamiliar consultation groups.

### Demographics

A total of 21 young people were consulted. Of these:

- 17 young people participated via telephone consultation
- Three young people participated via a group consultation at the CREATE NSW office

- One young person responded by completing a hard copy survey.

The group consultation was conducted with the support of Dr Judith Cashmore and Professor Ilan Katz.

The spread of ages is shown below:

*Age of participants*

13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
2	3	2	3			5	3			2	1	

In the consultations:

- Eight males and 13 females were interviewed.
- 11 participants were in foster care placement and 10 were living independently or in supported accommodation.
- Three young people identified as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- No young people identified as belonging to another cultural group.
- Seven young people were from the Sydney Metropolitan area, 10 from the southern region, three were from the Hunter region and one participant was from the northern region.

**Section 1**

The 21 participants were asked questions relating to:

- What they thought would be positive about participating in the Pathways of Care study.
- What would be the best age for commencing the study?
- What would make them want to take part in the interview.

*Positive outcomes for participating in the Pathways of Care study*

The majority of young people felt that sharing their opinions with Community Services would allow them to have their voices heard on what does and doesn't work. They also said they would like their input to create awareness of the issues facing CYPIC.

Two young people expressed concern that being interviewed by Community Services would reinforce the concept that the young person is 'different' from their peers and that is why they needed to be interviewed.

Another concern was expressed that the interview might not be a positive experience for the young person taking the survey in regard to their personal circumstances but it would be positive for the care sector as a whole.

### Age to start interviewing.

The young people's opinions were varied on this question. The range of responses varied from 10 years of age to 16 years of age as the best age to interview CYP, with the majority of young people selecting the ages 13-16 to be the most appropriate age range to start interviewing them.

### Reasons to want to participate in the interview with Community Services

The majority of young people (16 of 21) expressed that they would like incentives, such as cash, gifts, phones or vouchers, for their participation. Four of the young people said they wouldn't want an incentive and that they would just do it because they wanted their voice heard. One young person said he would not consider doing the interview at all because he felt negatively towards Community Services.

### Important issues children and young people should tell Community Services about coming into and being in care.

All the young people agreed that the following were important issues that needed to be covered in a research interview with Community Services

- Birth family contact
- Carer family
- Relationship with their caseworker
- Health
- Education

Additional issues identified by the young people that they believed that CS staff should be aware of included:

- That researchers should ask young people about their fears
- Whether their files were regularly updated how or whether the child or young person was coping
- The morale and happiness of the child or young person

## Section two

In this part of the survey, young people were given a scenario of a young person being interviewed for the first time for the longitudinal study by CS. They had to answer questions about the process, including the preferred length of the interview and the overall interview experience (view sample survey attached for further information).

### Length of interview

When asked about the length of the interview six out of the 21 agreed 30 minutes was an appropriate length for an interview with a child between 8-11 years. The rest of the young people thought between 10 and 20 minutes was reasonable.

All the young people agreed that 30 minutes was an appropriate length of time for an interview for a 12-17 year old with the exception of one young person who suggested 20 minutes as an alternative.

One young person suggested that a few interviews that are different lengths could be developed and then the young person can decide which is appropriate for them. While another young person suggested a break every 10 minutes for the young person during the interview.

### What could the interviewer do to make this the best experience for the child or young person?

The young people were asked about would make the interviewing process comfortable. These are themes the young people suggested they would like in an interviewer:

- To dress casually
- Be the same gender as them
- Be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander if the young person is
- Be a friendly and happy person
- Have a picnic
- Make the process informal
- Let the young person answer the questions and don't influence their response.
- Make them feel safe
- Go through the survey quickly
- Try to identify with the young person/know some information about the young person so they know what they're dealing with
- Have children's toys available for the younger children to play with during the interview
- Bring food
- Be clear about the process and what the information will be used for

### Is it okay to have the interview at the child or young person's home?

In regards to an appropriate location for an interview, young people said they thought initially, a child or young person should be asked where they believed the interview should be conducted.

In addition, four young people raised concerns about interviewing a child in their carer's home because the child or young person could be hesitant to say anything bad about their carer in their home. However, the majority of young people said it was okay to have the interview in the carer's home because the young person would be more comfortable.

One young person suggested having it at McDonalds.

### Should young people have the option to have a support person/buddy there?

Nearly all young people interviewed agreed that children and young people being interviewed should have the option to have a support person with them because of concerns that the interview could be a distressing experience.

### Is it okay to ask young people about their feelings when first coming into care or contact with their birth family, in their first interview?

Three young people said 'no' because they felt it was too sensitive to ask those questions in the first interview. The remaining 18 young people said 'yes' as long as the question was optional and the young person didn't have to answer it if they didn't want to.

## Section 3

Young people were asked to give feedback on a draft questionnaire which included topics that will be in the Pathways of Care study. In order to assist with categorising questions, young people were asked to rank questions on a 'traffic light' system (red for questions that are too sensitive, amber for sensitive questions and green for questions that are appropriate. Please see attachment for specific questions.

### Their care experience

In this section the young people said the questions were appropriate as long as they were optional.

One young person said they would prefer these questions not be asked in the first interview. One other young person believed the topic was too sensitive and it was an emotional issue to have to talk to a stranger about. She said it would be traumatic and would have to depend on the way the question was framed. An interesting point she made was that the researcher shouldn't be hearing about the young person's trauma but should be trying to get information they need to improve the care system.

With question 1b about young people's experience in their current placement, All agreed that it was fine to ask young people this question although one young person said this question should not be asked in the carer's home.

### Contact with birth family

Twenty of the twenty one young people said it was okay to ask about contact with their birth family; however children and young people would like, as an option, not to answer if they wished. One young person identified that a child or young person's age and situation may influence how or if they responded. One other young person said they didn't want to respond to questions about their birth family because CS didn't have the right to ask. Another young person noted that these questions need to be asked in a sensitive manner.



### Future arrangements

All the young people interviewed said it was okay to ask about their future living arrangements. One young person said to only ask this question if the young person is over 14 years of age.

### Help and services received since coming into care and schooling

All the young people said it was appropriate to be asked about help and services they received when they came into care. This included questions about their schooling.

### Friends and Peers

The young people all agreed that it was okay to be asked about how many friends they had at school.

However, two young people disagreed with the question about disclosing their friends' risk taking behaviours, including drug use and breaking the law. They asked whether this question was relevant to being in care and said it was too private to disclose. One young person said it would be useful to disclose this information in the interview because they would hope that Community Services would assist them with information and strategies to stay away from risk taking behaviours.

### Support

All the young people agreed it would be fine to be asked who they turn to for support when they're having problems.

### What sort of person they are

Most young people agreed that all questions were appropriate except for question D regarding risk taking behaviour because one young person said that young people wouldn't disclose if they were taking part in risk taking behaviours. Two young people disagreed with question E about body image because it was too personal and people might be self conscious. One young person disagreed about question F which refers to asking about a young person's health and medical problems

### Activities and Employment

All of the young people interviewed agreed that it was appropriate to be asked about activities and employment.

## Section 4

Young people were asked about what issues were important for care leavers.

All the young people who answered questions 1A to E said they believed the questions covered important aspects that researchers should know about leaving care. In relation to question D on TILA, the majority of young people interviewed said they didn't know they could apply for it when they left care.

Young people were also asked to describe what they would say is the most important thing to tell researchers about leaving care. Their answers were varied and are listed below.

#### What would you say is most important to tell researchers about leaving care?

- Stability
- Whether the young person is ready to leave care
- What the young person's emotions are in relation to leaving care
- If the young person is afraid of leaving care
- Does the young person have enough money
- Does the young person have enough have a good start/do they have life skills
- If they have counselling support
- What topics they want to bring up
- Young people in care need equal opportunities like mainstream young people
- It would be difficult not having a carer or support
- Information on how to get a good house
- Is the young person in a safe environment
- What is the young person's birth family relationship like
- How will the young people support themselves when they leave care.

#### Tell us how you think we could keep in touch with young people who start the study before they leave, but turn 18 partway through?

Suggestions from the 21 young people are below.

- 17 young people said phoning the young person would help
- Three young people suggested using Facebook
- Six young people suggested e-mail
- One young person suggested that researchers seek information about the participants' future living arrangements for possible contact details
- All young people said that incentives would be a useful strategy for young people to maintain contact - six young people suggested vouchers, five young people named financial incentives and 3 young people named prizes and gifts as their preferred rewards
- One young person said the interviewer and CS staff needed to convey to the young people the importance of participating in the survey and that their role in participating would make a difference and be an incentive in itself.

## Conclusions/recommendations:

In conclusion, CREATE found the phone consultations were a better means of engaging the young people in the interview process as the young people were more comfortable in responding and didn't feel as self conscious in a group of people they didn't know. An additional benefit of phone

consultations was an ability to access a broader range of participants, including young people from regional areas, than would be possible from face-to-face group consultations.

Young people wanted to know what the personal benefits would be for them for taking part in the longitudinal study and suggested incentives for young people participating. It is also important to highlight that some young people may have had a negative experience with CS previously and for this reason, may not want to participate in the study.

The young people stated that they preferred that the interviewer should be easy going, preferably older and the same gender as the young person. They also noted that if a young person identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, it was important they have an interviewer that is the same culture as them.

The young people commented on the skills of potential interviewers. Young people believed the interviewer should take time at the beginning of the interview to get to know the young person and find out about their interests to build trust. The interviewer should be dedicated to building rapport with young people and establishing their role to ensure the young person is clear about the process of the interview and their expectations. The young people needed to have realistic expectations of research process and what would happen with the information they share to ensure they understood it was not case work or a therapeutic response.

The interviewer should be properly trained and prepared if the child or young person disclosed that something negative is happening to them. Where possible, interviewers should depersonalise sensitive questions surrounding their entry into care and other questions that may re-traumatise the young person.

When questioned about the possible subject areas in the Pathways of Care study, young people were open to answering a variety of questions, but were clear that the questions needed to be optional and the young person could say no to answering if they were uncomfortable. They had concerns about the question regarding their peers and risk-taking behaviours as they believed it was a personal question and that many young people would not answer honestly.

An online survey that was interactive was the preferred means for participating in the survey. Doing the survey on paper was not attractive to young people. Young people discussed the possibilities of presenting the interview as an interactive game - e.g. a simulated game where they walk through stages and write down their feelings.

Many young people said there should be a focus on how young people felt about their care experience, i.e what their fears were and how they were coping in care. Young people suggested that a 'traffic light' system be implemented in the survey. A red, amber and green light so they could press red if a question is too sensitive for them to answer, amber if they are unsure and green for okay to answer.

Questions about personal relationships and partners in the survey needed to be inclusive of diverse sexualities.

A DVD could be produced that would appeal to young people, including their care peers discussing their life in care, the positive things Community Services has done for them, what could be done to improve the system. Post-interview should include an official debrief session about how they felt after sharing their information on maintaining the engagement of young people in the longitudinal survey, the young people also suggested that a birthday card could be sent to each young person on their birthday to keep them involved in the study and to feel appreciated.

Young people said that young people with disabilities should be included in the survey, particularly when they turn 18 years of age to continue to see their outcomes with their experience in Ageing, Disability and Home Care.