



# CREATE Position Paper

Issue: Stability in Care

## CREATE's Position

CREATE recognises that stability in care is critical to the ongoing development and wellbeing of children and young people. A stable care environment leads to better outcomes for children and young people in all developmental domains, including educational, social, emotional, and behavioural.

CREATE advocates for children and young people in out-of-home care to live in stable care environments that meet their individual needs. Placement stability is a key goal for improving a young person's life in the out-of-home care system (McDowall, 2013). This can be achieved only by reducing the number of placements a young person experiences while in care.

Stability in care can be achieved through well-resourced and actively supported placements, in some cases involving long-term legal guardianship. Any decision regarding the placement of a child or young person in care must include the child or young person in the decision-making process.

**Table 1**

***Out-of-Home Care National Standards that Apply to stability in care (FaHCSIA, 2011)***

National Standards	Measures
1. Children and young people will be provided with stability and security during their time in care.	Children and young people are to be matched with the most suitable carers and care environment according to the assessed needs. 1.1 The proportion of children and young people exiting out-of-home care during the year who has one or two placements by length of time in continuous care preceding exit. 1.3 The proportion of children and young people in out-of-home care who report feeling safe and secure in their current placement.
3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities participate in decisions concerning the care and placement of their children and young people.	3.1 The proportion of Indigenous children and young people in out of home care placed with the child's extended family, with the child's Indigenous community, or with other Indigenous people, by the carer type.

## Evidence

- The CREATE Report Card 2013 (McDowall, 2013) found that:
  - The mean number of placements varies across jurisdictions; however, young people report their stability satisfaction is directly related to the number of placement they have had while in care;
  - Children and young people report that their stability satisfaction was greatest when they were placed in kinship or foster care, and least when in residential care;
  - Indigenous children and young people reported having more placements, and therefore, less placement stability. In addition, significant risks to cultural continuity exist where indigenous children and young people are placed in culturally inappropriate care environments (see also Hermeston, McDougall, Burton, Smith, & Sydenham, 2016).
- Unstable care environments can have detrimental effects on children and young people. These effects can lead to emotional difficulties, poor psychosocial outcomes, and poor academic performance (AIFS,

2015). In addition, placement instability is a significant contributor to behavioural issues in children (Rubin, O'Reilly, Luan, & Localio, 2007).

- People who have been in out-of-home care and in unstable placements have the highest risk of social exclusion as adults, and are over represented on every measure of social pathology and disadvantage (Jackson & Cameron, 2012).
- Placement stability has declined during recent years, particularly for Indigenous children and young people who are over-represented at all levels of the out-of-home care system, and who have more placements than non-Indigenous children and young people (AIFS, 2015; AIHW, 2015, 2016; Mendes, Saunders, & Baidawi, 2016).
- Impacts of placement instability include:
  - disrupted schooling experiences for children and young people;
  - a lack of transitional and continuing support for young people exiting care;
  - poor longitudinal planning for young people in preparation for exiting care; and
  - cultural issues with indigenous children and young people reporting more placements than other children, less stability, and less engagement in decision-making (Hermeston et al., 2016; Mendes, et al., 2016).

## Actions

CREATE calls on federal, state, and territory ministers with responsibility for child protection to implement strategies based on developing a strong understanding of children and young people's lived experience in out-of-home care, and their expressed need to have increased stability in care.

CREATE will advocate for the implementation in each state and territory of policy to ensure that:

1. Children and young people, who live in out-of-home care, experience stable placements that respond to their individual care needs and maximise developmental and educational outcomes.
2. Federal, state, and territory governments ensure that policy and practice is influenced by the views of the children and young people currently and previously living in out-of-home care, and that children and young people are included in decision-making processes.
3. Positive child and young person directed outcomes, based on current research and practice, focussed on wellbeing and development through enhanced stability of children and young people in care, are prioritised when considering placement options.

## References

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