

MEDIA RELEASE

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NSW BRIEFING - INDEPENDENT EVALUATION REVEALS BARRIERS TO KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE

Sydney, today, CREATE Foundation will provide a briefing in relation to Dr Joseph McDowall's latest research in the area of Transitioning to Independence titled "CREATE's *Go Your Own Way* resource for young people transitioning from care in Australia: An evaluation."

The lack of transition planning greatly hinders a young person's journey to Independence from the care system. Many experience homelessness, unemployment, and educational disruption. In 2013, the Australian Government¹ supported the CREATE Foundation to develop a leaving care package, the "Go Your Own Way" (GYOW) Kit, aimed at improving the transition-to-independence process and outcomes for all young people in out-of-home care.

The findings of this evaluation were significant and in direct response, the New South Wales Department of Families and Community Services allocated funding support for 900 further kits to be developed in the value of \$51,000.

The GYOW kit was distributed through working closely with each child protection department to reach young people aged 17 years in 2014 and who were preparing to leave care in 2015. As detailed in the report, **governments differed in terms of the extent to which they shared young persons' contact information**, resulting in significant effort being required by CREATE in order to reach young people.

CREATE could find contact information for 1146 of the 1961 young people who had left care during the research project. Of these, **39% could not be found because the contact details were inaccurate** (see table 2, page 13 in evaluation).

Child safety, and the best interests of the young person, must take priority over the need for privacy. Evaluation report author, Dr Joseph McDowall says that it would be expected that government departments, as the **corporate parent** to those in care, should keep records of where the young people they have cared for go after leaving the system so that the young persons' progress can be followed and the support they might require determined.

"It would be unusual for parents to not know where their adult children are after leaving home, or fail to ensure that they are well-prepared for independence, safe, and connected to others," said Dr McDowall.

"Vulnerable young people, who often have already experienced trauma through being removed from an unsafe family situation, need continued support after turning 18, rather than be expected to function totally independently as care-leavers."

Significant Findings

- 52% of respondents contacted by CREATE said that they had received a Kit. This low number resulted from ineffective distribution processes.
- Many young people who received a Kit said that they found it useful for their Transition to Independence.
- Overall, 42% of young people knew about their leaving-care plan.
- However, significantly more young people who received a GYOW Kit had a plan compared with those who did not have access to a Kit.
- Results indicate that about half of young people leaving care do not know how to adequately deal with financial issues, accommodation and face deep uncertainty about what the future would hold for them.
- However, those who had a plan felt more confident about the future than did those without a plan.

The GYOW Kit Evaluation reinforces that leaving care planning is critical in a young care leaver's life outcomes.

CREATE Foundation Chief Executive, Ms Jacqui Reed, said that this report highlights the progress made towards improving transitioning and life outcomes for care leavers.

"Most of all we can categorically say that those with a Kit are more likely to have a leaving care plan, which is a significant step forward. Barriers to contacting young people and logistical challenges affected the Kit's potential positive impact."

"Rather than young people in care dreading turning 18 and potentially being at risk, CREATE looks forward to strengthening the collaboration across all jurisdictions to ensure that vital information is shared, and young people are empowered to plan effectively for their transitioning to independence."

Since 2006, CREATE Foundation has informed government and the child protection sector through independent consultations and undertaken major national projects exploring transitioning from care in Australia.

Some people experience multiple placements (i.e., in some cases up to 50 homes in a few short years), along with being without a continuous positive adult influence in their life, leading to poor life skills, financial awareness, or ability to look after their own wellbeing.

CREATE's Executive Director of Research, Dr McDowall shared that it is difficult to imagine not only what being removed from your family and placed in care is like, but also then having to leave where you have been living when you turn 18.

In parts of the US and UK, authorities are aiming to reduce the pressure on young people by giving them an option to extend their care until 21. It is time for a similar change in Australia. Positive outcomes have been well documented overseas following the extension of care, yet here the leaving care age remains at 18. *"The age of 18 is when many life changes are occurring for young people; adding another at this stage requiring them to leave where they have been living would seem an unnecessary negative experience."*

"Leaving care planning was found to be enhanced using the GYOW Kits. These should be provided to all care leavers in time to enable planning to occur; caseworkers also must explain to the young people the value of the Kits, and help them use the resource," continued Dr McDowall.



CREATE calls for a continuation of the *Go Your Own Way* program; extending the age of leaving care age to 21 (similar to the US and UK models), and establishing a system of continuing support for care leavers, such as the personal advisors (mentors) already operating in the UK and which have been trialled successfully in Australia.

The official New South Wales briefing will take place in Sydney, attended by government decision-makers, child protection sector representatives, workers, and children and young people with an out-of-home care experience. For information contact Leigh White as shown below:

Media Enquiries & to register as Media Attending contact:

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View CREATE's past reports here: <http://create.org.au/publications/create-research-reports/>

The GYOW Kit is available via this [Link to GYOW Workbook](#)

Footnotes: 1 As part of the *National Framework for Protecting Australian Children 2009–2020*

Sources: * Data source: McDowall, J. J. (2013). *Experiencing out-of-home care in Australia: The views of children and young people (CREATE Report Card 2013)*. Sydney: CREATE Foundation.

