

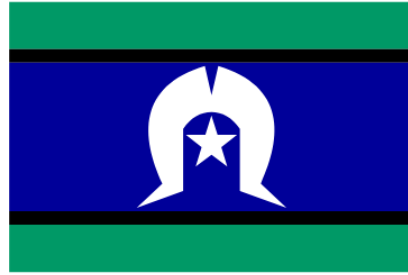
NEABY



**Charter for
young parents in
out-of-home
care**

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CREATE Foundation's National Experience to Action Board (Youth) - NEABY, with CREATE Foundation acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners of the lands, skies, and waters where we live, learn and work.

This land, now called Australia, was never ceded.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present, as well as to knowledge holders and community leaders across all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

We honour over 60,000 years of raising children with care and love, strong, proud, and connected to Culture and Country.

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Charter for young parents in out-of-home care

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Foreword: Australia's charter for supporting young parents in care

Australia loves children and loves families, we celebrate and support keeping families together wherever possible. New babies bring so much joy to those around them.

Our babies carry our legacies, and are the future of everything we work towards.

This charter was developed by members of the CREATE Foundation's National Experience to Action Board (Youth) NEABY – drawing on our lived experiences, the lived experiences of CREATE members who are parents, and the national and international evidence about how all communities can support new parents with a care experience.

We bring our intimate understanding of the harmful effects of stigma and lack of support provided to young parents. We bring our lived experience of how the child protection system responded to us, during pregnancy, for those of us who experienced the sadness of pregnancy loss, the pressure to abort our babies, during birth and post-partum, and the pressure to be perfect as new parents. We know the difference support and kindness made at every stage, and the harm that was done when it was absent.

There is nothing more important to us than our babies, their laughter, joy, beauty and success. We live to love, nurture, celebrate and raise them, from the moment they are born and every moment of their precious lives.

We understand the hurt and confusion caused by the removal of children from parents. The most important people in our babies' lives, is us, their loving and hard-working parents. We may be young, but that does not change our love. We may have been removed from our parents, but that does not mean we will not be the very best parents this world has ever seen. We know that raising a child takes a village. As government departments, community service organisations, foster or kinship carers – during this most precious time in our lives, you are often the only village we know.

Throughout Australia each year, many young people in care experience pregnancy, and many become parents. This charter is for them, and ensuring that Australian young parents have the best basis to support their children to thrive.

The charter sets out what government will do to help young people to plan for being a parent, what government will do if we experience the heartbreak of pregnancy loss, how government will support young people when we become parents and what we will all do to challenge stigma and disadvantage.

Cheyenne Robertson-Brown

Youth Board member, National Experience to Action Board (Youth)

Cheyenne is the author of Australia's first and only Charter for Young Parents in Out-of-Home Care throughout 2025.

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CREATE Foundation's National Experience to Action Board (Youth), have developed Australia's first and only charter for supporting young parents in care

The charter is our expectations of government to care for us



Before we become parents



During our pregnancy



If we experience the heartbreak of pregnancy loss



If we decide or need to have an abortion



When our precious baby arrives



Challenge stigma and discrimination



If we are ever separated from our babies or children, by you or by circumstances

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Before we become parents

We may have experienced family violence, neglect and abuse, or loss of our parent or parents in our childhoods. This wasn't our fault. We are children.

Our experiences in care, how the adults around us treat us and treat each other, and connection with community show us as children and young people what healthy relationships look like.

You provide our ecosystem of support that builds healthy relationships, love and care. You show us what strong, loving, and connected relationships and families can be. We learn about consent from you, we learn about emotional, physical and sexual safety from you.

While we are growing up, you are the ones we rely on to show us safe and stable relationships, how to build the life we want and where we can turn to for support and help when we need it.

Everything you do while we are in your care is so important, ensures that when we are parents, we have the knowledge, skills and supports to build our family and future filled with love, safety and stability for ourselves and our babies.

We expect that government, carers and community will:

- Discuss sex, consent and healthy relationships with all children and young people in care.
- Teach us what the red flags are for grooming and child sexual abuse while we are in care.
- Talk to us about coercive control, behaviours that lead to violence and harm, and show us what supportive, respectful and equal relationships look like in friendships and in romantic relationships.
- Respect our body autonomy and our choices.
- Make sure young people have choices and access to family planning advice and contraception, so we can be wise and informed as we explore our sexuality as teenagers and young adults.
- Support young people to start a family at the time we chose, that is right for us.
- Prepare us for being a parent, from the experience of trying to conceive, pregnancy, loss, birth and post-partum, infant first aid and care, and everything that follows – supporting us every step of the way.

This could involve opportunities to learn about caring for babies and children, mentoring and advice from parenting role models and providing support to help you work through your thoughts and feelings about the parenting that you experienced.

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During our pregnancy

We rely on your support to provide us with a solid foundation for a healthy and thriving pregnancy, we expect our communities, government and carers to walk with us with and bring together the range of essential services and supports for our health and the health of our babies.

During pregnancy, the health and wellbeing of expectant mothers and babies is our priority. We are also committed to supporting the wellbeing and inclusion of our partners. Pregnancy is a time for nurture, celebration and nesting.

Individual needs and circumstances are different. Some parents will need little support, while others will need more help.

We expect government, carers and community to listen to us when we are pregnant, to be honest with us, and to work with us and our partners to make sure:

- We have the things we need – including a place to live, money and essential items.
- We are connected to the services we need for birth planning, midwifery and obstetrics, pregnancy screening, and physical and psychological supports during pregnancy.
- We know our rights and entitlements – including benefits, grants and resources for parents in the community we live, and through the government departments, community service organisations and agencies that are involved in our care and in the broader community for all young parents.
- We know what to do – and can access courses, peer support and services for expectant parents – this could include calm birthing classes, nutrition during pregnancy, lactation and breastfeeding education and support, guidance on how to change a nappy or bath a baby, and medical advice during pregnancy or for our newborn baby.

We expect that your support will be ongoing, as what we will need to know will change as our child gets older.

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If we experience the unplanned loss of pregnancy

All miscarriages are complicated, everyone's experience is different, and each young person in care will need different things.

You are often all that we have for comfort, support and care. If you don't show up for us, and don't allow others to be there for us, we are all alone, and it's scary and sad.

We expect that government, carers and community will make sure that:

- We have someone to call to help us and support us if we miscarry.
- We are given the space to grieve and privacy to process what we need to in our hearts, our bodies, and with our loved ones.
- We are connected with a supportive maternity ward and receive healthcare that treats us with care, respect and kindness, and is accessible to us where we live.
- We can access the health, obstetrics, gynecological and fertility supports that we need.
- We can access psychological support and care for loss and grief, and any other challenges that might come up after a miscarriage. Our partners are also supported for their loss.
- The physical and practical supports are in place for us to connect with school, work and recreation when we are ready to do so.

If we decide or need to have an abortion

It is always our choice whether or not we wish to have an abortion, and we expect your unconditional support for what is right for us. Everyone's experience is different and each young person in care will need different things.

We expect that government, carers and community will make sure that:

- We can access safe and supported abortion and fertility care, in the place and timing that is right for us.
- We can access the health, obstetrics, gynecological and fertility supports that we need.
- We can access psychological support and care associated with our choice of an abortion, and any other challenges that might come up for us before, during, or after an abortion.
- Physical and practical supports are in place for us to connect with school, work and recreation when we are ready to do so.
- We are given the space, respect, love and care to acknowledge that our decision now does not mean we won't someday desire a baby and a family, in our own time and when it is right for us.

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When our precious baby is born

They say it takes a village to raise a child. Our children are a precious and incredible gift to us.

You are an important part of creating a nurturing community around us, to give us all the support needed for our children's healthy development and growth. You are part of making sure that we can connect with our babies from the moment they are born, and throughout their lives. You are part of the community that will cultivate and strengthen the critical bonds between us, our babies, our loved ones and family members. The community and supports around us, that you provide, will ensure that the critical bond and attachment between us and our baby is never severed.

We expect that government, carers and community will acknowledge that parenting can be rewarding but also challenging. We expect that you will support us so that we know:

- Who is available to support us – who we can contact if we need advice and support, even in the middle of the night or on weekends.
- What services and supports are available in our local area – we expect that you will discuss these options with us and help us to attend if we would like to. This will include services available to all parents as well as those specifically available for young parents with lived experience of out-of-home care.

We expect that, as our care-givers, and our support network, you will be there to:

- Make sure our health and recovery following pregnancy and birth is a priority, and support is there for us to access women's health physiotherapy, lactation support, recovery massage and post-partum health appointments, so that our bodies are strong and recover well.
- Make sure that we can have a break and a bit of help (if we want a break). This could be time for a rest, or time to pursue hobbies and interests, make sure you can access leisure centers, post-partum swimming and recovery, and gyms. Or time to cuddle and feed our new baby while someone helps clear some laundry, dishes and fills our fridge and freezer with easy and nourishing food for the months of our babies' precious life.
- Help us as we dream and plan for our futures, support us to continue in our education, our employment and careers and our pursuits that will set us up to provide for our babies and build a bright future for us as a family.
- Support us with practical help with the paperwork for birth certificates, health appointments, how to register for childcare, kinder or school places for the best start for our little ones, safe transport with little ones, relationship supports, finding suitable child dentist or optician if needed, and other things that new parents and little babies need.
- Help us get priority access for any specialist assessments and supports that our little ones might need for their healthy development and growth, ensure we can be with them throughout it all and raise them with all of their needs met.

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Challenging stigma and discrimination

We believe in a community that celebrates and supports young parents and their babies. Every little one deserves the best start in life, and every parent deserves support. We know that young parents in and leaving care, can experience stigma and disadvantage. This is unacceptable.

We expect that as our carers and our community, you will:

- Make resources available that challenge unhelpful assumptions about young parents in care and leaving care.

We know that many young parents experience discrimination, and have their babies reported to child protection without evidence of risk.

It is our greatest fear that our babies will be taken away from us just because we are young and were raised in out-of-home care. We expect that this is the generation where this discrimination stops. It stops with you.

If there are any concerns about how we are going as new parents, we expect that you will:

- Talk with us, watch us love and care for our little ones, give us the time and care and support that all new parents need over the first year or two of their babies' life, to find our way and connect with our little ones – just like every other parent needs – and kindly support us.

If there will be any formal involvement that might lead to the removal of our new babies, we expect that you will make sure that:

- We have access to advocacy and legal advice.
- Our care history and records are not used against us.
- We are treated fairly and our rights are respected.
- We understand what is happening and what plans are in place.
- Our opinions are heard and included.
- We have access to support to address concerns and demonstrate change. This could include support with housing, mental health or counselling, relationship or parenting courses, and disability support.

We ask that the supports and care that you would consider to be part of universal services, and available for all parents are provided to us – so that young parents in out-of-home care are no longer excluded and denied these basic supports.

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If we are living apart from children

If our children are removed by child protection, we expect that you will support us to be the best parents we can for our precious little ones.

We know that young parents may be separated from children for a range of reasons. This could include situations where they live with the other parent, or there has been concerns about parenting. Whatever the circumstances, we expect that you will support us in building and maintaining a relationship with our child.

Depending on the situation, this support may be practical (assisting us to see and spend time with our child), financial (e.g. travel costs), emotional (discussing our thoughts and feelings) and ensuring we have access to advocacy or legal advice (to make sure our rights to see our child are respected).

If our child has been removed, we expect that you will not abandon us and will never give up on us. We expect that you will act with urgency, and provide every support to return our babies to our loving care as soon as possible – recognising that every moment away from them is too long.

We expect that you will take time to support us and help us deal with the practical, financial, and emotional implications. This could include supporting us through the legal proceedings, attending meetings, dealing with housing issues, managing benefit changes, as well as coping with grief and loss. We expect that you will support us to build and maintain a relationship with our child.

The commitments laid out in this charter still apply to young parents who have had their children removed, we expect you to proactively keep advocating for us to be the parents and caregivers of our own children, and do all you can do until they are in our safe and ongoing care. We expect you to keep supporting us, and planning for our future.

Finally, pledge your support – stand with us for positive change

We are young parents in care, and we have written this charter to invite you – those in positions of responsibility for young people and young parents who live in out-of-home care – to do your best to support all young parents in care and leaving care.

It is really important to us that you see us, our hopes, and our love for our babies. They are everything to us, and we want to be the very best parents for their whole entire lives.

We invite you to acknowledge the spirit of this Charter, and to pledge, sign up and commit to doing what you can to improve responses to young parents and help make strong policies, programs and supports available now and into the future.

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Pledge

As a
(e.g. Minister, public servant, carer, community member),

I pledge my support and commit to act in response to the expectations and aspirations laid out in this charter.

I recognise the exceptional need for support, care and response for young parents in care.

I make this pledge in response to the overwhelming evidence about this need. I understand and see before me the opportunity to profoundly prevent cycles of family violence, abuse and neglect.

I value the voices and lived experiences of young parents in care. In my work and my life, I will act to support young parents in care to build the brightest futures for their babies and their families.

This means that I will have young parents in care front of mind when I make decisions.

I pledge my support for young parents in out-of-home care.

.....

Signature

..... / /

Date

.....

Name