



## MEDIA STATEMENT

12 March 2014

# SEXUAL ABUSE OF KIDS WHILST IN CARE HIGHLIGHTS INCREASED SUPPORTS NEEDED

Today's shocking reports of Victorian children, as young as 12 who live in residential out-of-home care, being sexually abused by a gang of men highlights the fact that today's children are not safe, even when placed in the care of the state.

*"The allegation that authorities could have been aware of this criminal abuse for two years, and that the abuse continued, is beyond comprehension,"* stated Ms Jacqui Reed, CREATE Foundation Chief Executive Officer.

*"This indicates the child protection system is not only under immense pressure as the numbers of children being placed in care continue to increase, but that the current checks and balances are inadequate."*

CREATE Foundation is the peak consumer body for children and young people in out-of-home care. CREATE continues its call on all Australian governments and the Royal Commission to work towards a child protection system that is accountable, transparent and responsive to the needs of the children who, on a daily basis, live within this sometimes flawed system.

Children and young people with a care experience are often highly vulnerable, disengaged and lack support networks. This can lead to people being vulnerable and the desire to belong increasing their potential to be exploited by predators.

*"CREATE Foundation recognises that young people in residential care need to be treated with respect - as 'service users' instead of being labelled as the "difficult" kids in care,"* said Ms Reed.

*"These young people have unique needs and should be thought of as service users, and not as 'naughty kids', it is essential that young people are included in consultations and respected – after all, they are in care through no fault of their own."*

Residential care units are complex settings for both workers and users of the service. Young people with a residential care experience have told CREATE that the lack of privacy and focus on strict rules and curfews in residential care units can be extremely challenging to cope with. Young teens are often placed with older people up to 18 years of age. This is further complicated with tension around the young adults who may seek a sense of a 'normal' life, where they can enjoy the freedom to say, go out to visit friends of an evening and similar.

Solutions to prevent this horrendous crime in the future should not necessarily require an Inquiry (reported by ABC radio "AM" program) but rather to have this significant level of funding applied to increased supports and ongoing staff training, for those who work very hard in such complex environments.

Safety in the residential units can be increased with greater monitoring, including managerial oversight. Independent evaluations of the units and open and transparent complaints processes are fundamental elements to improving the current system.

*"Most of all, the road to a legitimate solution must include active consultation with the people who utilise the care system – the young people in residential care. For without this collaboration, the current format is adults trying to find solutions without hearing the voice of the service users, which is destined not to succeed,"* said Ms Reed.

CREATE Foundation is the independent peak body representing the voices of children and young people with an out-of-home care experience. Learn more at [www.create.org.au](http://www.create.org.au)

In Australia, over 40,000 children and young people live in care (i.e. foster, residential, kinship care) increasing by 9% every year. Through no fault of their own, children and young people may be placed in care due to neglect or abuse.

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