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## MEDIA RELEASE

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# CREATE CALLS FOR FOCUS ON EARLY INTERVENTION SUPPORTS FOR ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER FAMILIES

Imagine if children in your community were ten times more likely to be removed from their family and placed in out-of-home care? This is not imagined but is the reality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. And since the Human Rights Inquiry<sup>1</sup> reported to government in 1997, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait children and young people being placed in care has increased by 400%.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children make up 5% of this nation's child population. Yet from this cohort, one in ten children is removed from their families, creating the most over-represented group in the out-of-home system (i.e. kinship, residential or foster care). 34% of the 39,000 kids in out-of-home care identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Families living in remote communities are rightfully frightened by the prospect of a hurried risk assessment, often attended by police. When children and young people are removed from their family, their cultural and personal identity is often lost when they are placed in care. In many cases they are placed a long way from their families, which is a significant issue when maintaining contact with family and cultural identity.

CREATE Foundation's Report Card 2013<sup>2</sup> revealed that almost a quarter of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people surveyed by CREATE didn't know much about their family history and only 10% knew that they had a cultural support plan.

*"With the learnings we gained from the experiences of the Stolen Generation it is no less than unbelievable that this level of over representation continues today"* said Ms Jacqui Reed, Chief Executive Officer, CREATE Foundation.

*"The impact on a child when they are removed from their family is traumatic and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people the potential loss of cultural identity is a very real prospect and extremely concerning to CREATE,"* said Ms Reed.

*"Culturally appropriate placements must be a top priority, and aligned with the "Child Placement Principle" of extended family, friends and community being the first people whom authorities would contact regarding caring for the child being removed."*

Too often, it seems the Child Placement Principle is being overlooked, indicating a failure of the child protection system. A lot of dedicated child protection workers are being placed under

incredible strain, facing impossible time and logistical constraints – including a lack of knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Right now, child protection workers are without adequate resources and are expected to develop solutions that may not exist today. A more flexible approach is needed from the top down, says Frank Hytten, Chief Executive Officer of SNAICC (Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care) and CREATE board member.

*“There are dedicated people working hard to make a difference. What we need is more flexibility from government, and to ensure the wisdom of Aboriginal people is included and shared through these programs and services,”* said Mr Hytten.

An example of this approach could be the creation of an office or service that a family who is struggling can visit as a step before the traditional and somewhat less flexible and larger scale departmental avenues.

*“It means that a parent having a tough time may be able to speak with a person from their community, or who understands their community’s unique needs and be able to offer supports.”*

*“Intensive family support is needed in our communities and this type of early intervention, before warning signs in a family reach a crisis stage has the potential to deliver significant change.”*

CREATE Foundation is the peak voice for children and young people in out-of-home care. Learn more at [www.create.org.au](http://www.create.org.au)

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1. *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Report, “Bringing them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (April 1997)
2. *Data Source: McDowall, J. J. (2013). Experiencing Out-of-Home Care in Australia: The View of Children and Young People* (CREATE Report Card 2013). Sydney: CREATE Foundation.