

On 29th of September 2015, CREATE held the second panel of the inaugural *Hear Our Voice* series featuring a panel of 8 young people with a care experience. The aim of the event was to give young people a voice and provide a space to share their solutions to improve the Out-Of-Home-Care system.

HEAR OUR VOICE!

create
FOUNDATION

Volume
2

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAID ABOUT...

SOCIAL MEDIA

"I found it embarrassing not being on social media because kids ask you why you are not on it."

- Young people experience isolation and bullying due to restricted access to social media. Restricted access to social media feels like a punishment for being in care.

SOLUTION: Explain clearly to young people why there are restrictions on social media. Work together with the young person on ways to access social media safely. E.g. agree to supervise online activity for 9-14 year olds.

SIBLING CONTACT

"I really felt alone, for the first time in my life I didn't have anyone by my side, my brother was my protector."

- Most young people want to live with their siblings. Most feel the only person who understands their worries and their experience is their brother or sister.
- Sibling separation makes young people feel anxious, sad and unsafe. It can fragment their sense of identity.

SOLUTION: Prioritise sibling placements. If siblings cannot be placed together, ensure frequent meaningful contact.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD CASEWORKER

"You don't feel good about your caseworker when they break their promises. It makes you feel like they don't care about you."

- When caseworkers break their promises, young people feel betrayed and scared that they can't rely on their caseworkers.
- Young people need time to open up and build trust. Young people want their boundaries respected.
- Young people want clear and open communication about caseworker's expectations.

SOLUTION: Honesty and Transparency. Earn young people's trust. Give them space and respect their boundaries.

BEING REMOVED

"The day I was taken into care...I was really confused because no one explained to me what was happening."

- Young people often do not know why they were removed.
- Young people often experience removals as a traumatic event, especially when police are involved.

SOLUTION: Police must receive special training. Young people prefer police to be in plain clothes. Caseworkers must be experienced and proactive in directing police officers. Assign a designated worker to stay with the young person throughout the removal.

CHANGING PLACEMENTS

"It got to a point where I was moving to a new placement every week. This made me feel like no one cared about me."

- Moving placements is extremely traumatic for young people as they often do not receive sufficient warning that they are moving or any explanation of placement breakdowns.

SOLUTION: Give as much information and explanation as possible. If the child is too young for an "adult" conversation, write a letter in their file about the placement breakdown. Take time to ensure the right match between carers and young people to prevent breakdown.

CARERS

"When I went to my long-term placement I was terrified, like how was I supposed to trust strangers?"

- Young people find new placements extremely daunting.
- Young people want carers who are non-judgmental, understanding and patient.
- Young people need time to get used to their carers and for carers to get to know them as individuals.
- Carers may not understand the impact of young people's past trauma on their current behaviour.

SOLUTION: Alleviate anxiety by introducing young people to carers through arranging a meetup, a weekend respite, a phone call in the car with the carer or providing basic information. Provide training and support to carers about the impact of trauma on young people.

Take Home Messages

- ✓ Facilitate safe access to social media
- ✓ Prioritise sibling placements
- ✓ Keep promises to young people
- ✓ Respect young people's boundaries
- ✓ Actively supporting young people during removal
- ✓ Provide explanations about placement breakdowns
- ✓ Support young people during contact visits
- ✓ Introduce young people to prospective carers
- ✓ Provide training about trauma to carers



CONTACT WITH FAMILY

"I asked to have a contact visit with my Auntie and my caseworker said no because of a reason that she didn't explain to me."

- Young people feel confused and disrespected when they do not receive an explanation for why contact visits are not possible.
- Young people want workers who are appropriate for the contact visit (e.g. a female worker to accompany a young girl and her mother for a beauty day)
- Young people want contact workers to be present and engaged during the visit as this makes them feel safe.

SOLUTION: Assign workers who are gender appropriate for contact visits. Be engaged during contact visits and be a source of support for the young person. If contact is not possible, provide an honest explanation.

Recommendations for the OOH System

The *Hear Our Voice Volume 2* forum provides a rich source of information to inform broader changes in the Out-Of-Home-Care system to reflect the needs and views of young people in care.

Recommendations:

1. Establish mechanisms to allow social media access for young people in care.
2. Prioritise sibling placements or establish procedures to ensure meaningful contact is maintained.
3. Train police officers in trauma informed care. Train caseworkers to work effectively with police.
4. Train caseworkers on how to have honest conversations on challenging topics: why the young person was removed, why a placement broke down or why family contact is not possible.
5. Assign appropriate workers and train staff to support young people during contact visits.
6. Establish ways to allow young people to be informed about prospective carers and meet carers to maximise the placement match.

What YOU can do

We asked participants to reflect on how they will improve positive experiences for young people care. You told us YOU will:

You can:

- Create a trusting friendship with the young person
- Not approach working with young people like a business
- Communicate openly and without jargon
- Involve the young person as much as possible where there is placement breakdowns and provide an honest explanation
- Listen and get to know the young person
- Train caseworkers to better communicate and support young people
- Respect young people as individuals
- Continue to be open and transparent
- Do more talking and listening – less filling out forms!
- Provide better access to caseworkers
- Build a better relationship with residential houses and police