

National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children

Proposed focus and scope of the Fourth Action Plan

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About CREATE Foundation

CREATE Foundation is the national consumer body for children and young people with an out-of-home-care (OOHC) experience. We represent the voices of almost 48 000 children and young people currently in care, and those who have transitioned from care up to the age of 25.

Our vision is that all children and young people with a care experience reach their full potential, in line with our mission to:

- **CONNECT** children and young people to each other, CREATE and their community *to*;
- **EMPOWER** children and young people to build self-confidence, self-esteem, and skills that enable them to have a voice and be heard *to*;
- **CHANGE** the care system, in consultation with children and young people, through advocacy to improve policies, practices and services and increase community awareness.

We achieve our mission by facilitating a variety of programs and services for children and young people in care.



Introduction

CREATE Foundation welcomes the opportunity to provide commentary on the Commonwealth Government Department of Social Services' discussion paper as part of the national consultation for the fourth and final Action Plan of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009 – 2020.

CREATE acknowledges and commends the Department's work within the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children and the summation of concepts as presented in the proposed focus and scope of the Fourth Action Plan. CREATE is broadly supportive of the four key priority areas as outlined and has provided specific commentary to several of the priority areas below.


We wish to draw the Department's attention firstly and most significantly to the **absence of supported transition from the out-of-home care sector** in the proposed fourth action plan. The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009 – 2020 called for increased consistency and prioritising transition from out-of-home care for young people. Supported transition for young people in the care sector has been a key feature of the three previous action plans under the National Framework with a focus on delivering support for young people transitioning from out-of-home care to enable appropriate transition to adulthood. However, the removal of ongoing support for young people transitioning from the out-of-home care sector, from the Fourth Action Plan, fails one of the most vulnerable groups in our society and one that has significantly reduced outcomes when compared with their peers who do not have a care history (McDowall, 2013).

Substantial Australian and international research points to the increased likelihood of poorer life outcomes for young people leaving the care sector. A recent piece of work commissioned by Anglicare Victoria (2016) and conducted by Deloitte studied the benefits of introducing a program for Victorian young people in all forms of out-of-home care in which they are provided the option to remain in care until 21 years of age. This study showed that the probability of the young person experiencing homelessness halved, the likelihood of continuing in further education increased; and the likelihood of alcohol and drug dependence reduced. Additional benefits are also likely to be seen in mental and physical health and intergenerational disadvantage.

A number of nationally consistent leaving care tools also exist to aid young people in transitioning to independence including CREATE's Go Your Own Way (GYOW) kit and have shown benefit for young people transitioning from care. In a 2016 evaluation of the GYOW kit, it was evident that young people who received the kit were more likely to have a leaving care plan and those with a leaving care plan reported feeling more confident in living independently than those who did not (McDowall, 2016). This highlights the value of these important tools in supporting young people with transition, and ongoing implementation of these tools needs to be enabled by the inclusion of supported transition in the Fourth Action Plan.

In recognition of the substantial risks posed to young people leaving out-of-home care, the Federal Government, under the Third Action Plan, funded the Towards Independent Adulthood trial in Western Australia. This trial remains ongoing until mid 2020. Ensuring supported transition from out-of-home care remains a focus within the Fourth Action Plan will enable an appropriate avenue in which to report the results of this important trial and contribute substantially to learnings going forward.

Recommendation: CREATE recommends that supported transition from out-of-home care be incorporated into the Fourth Action Plan to enable an appropriate summation of activities under the National Framework and within the first three action plans and to ensure young people leaving the out-of-home care sector are adequately supported to achieve their full potential.



Priority Area 1: Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at risk of entering, or in contact with the child protection system

CREATE supports all efforts that place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at the centre of focus. With the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care likely to treble in 20 years without significant changes, it is clear this vulnerable population requires dedicated attention.

Ensuring the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and the broader Aboriginal community is incorporated when addressing system change is essential to ensure culturally appropriate and needs based services. A consultation conducted by CREATE in 2011 asked Indigenous children and young people what communities and organisations could do to support them and prevent them entering the out-of-home care sector. Strategies aimed at preventing first entry into the child protection system and supporting families to retain their children in their homes were of most significance to Indigenous children and young people. Of great concern are findings indicating that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people across Australia are not provided with enough information about the care process. Indigenous children knew less about why they came into care and had less information provided to them than non-Indigenous children in care (McDowall, 2013).

Recommendation: Efforts to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at risk of entering or currently in the child protection system must hold them and their communities as expert in planning and decision making regarding crucial life decisions. Increasing investment in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to enhance family support is a crucial component of this.

Priority Area 3: Improving outcomes for all children in out-of-home care by enhancing placement stability and ensuring lifelong relationships and a sense of belonging, identity and connection to culture and community, through reunification, and other permanent care options, including adoption

Enhancing placement stability

CREATE recognises that stability in care is critical to the ongoing development and wellbeing of children and young people. A stable care environment leads to better outcomes for children and young people in all developmental domains, including educational, social, emotional, and behavioural.

CREATE research (McDowall, 2013) unsurprisingly found that young people directly correlate their stability satisfaction with the number of placements they have had in care. Satisfaction is highest when they were placed in kinship or foster care and lowest when placed in residential care.

Placement stability has declined during recent years, particularly for Indigenous children and young people who are over-represented at all levels of the out-of-home care system, and who have more placements than non-Indigenous children and young people (AIFS, 2015; AIHW, 2015, 2016; Mendes, Saunders, & Baidawi, 2016).

Stability in care can be achieved through well-resourced and actively supported placements, in some cases involving long-term legal guardianship.

Recommendation: The fourth action plan articulates that policy and practice regarding placement stability be influenced by the views of children and young people currently and previously living in out-of-home care and that children and young people are included in decision making processes regarding their placement stability.



Connection to culture and community through reunification and other permanent care options

CREATE through our National Survey (McDowall, 2013) found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people experience more attempts at restoration than non-Indigenous young people. Forty-five percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people reported returning to live with their birth parents three or more times. While this shows a commitment to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are being reunified with family, it also suggests that these attempts at restoration are repeatedly unsuccessful, resulting in young people being returned to care more often.

In addition, McDowall (2016) found that 30.7% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care across Australia identified feeling little or no connection with culture.

Recommendation: CREATE recommends a review of precipitating factors that impede reunification efforts and strategies to better support families after a child or young person is restored to their family's care. Prioritising strategies to improve a young person's knowledge of their own family story and of their own story of coming into care are both important steps to enhance cultural connectedness.

Priority Area 4: Improving organisations' and governments' ability to keep children and young people safe from abuse

CREATE Foundation commends the Department and the National Children's Commissioner on the development of the National Statement of Principles for Child Safe Organisations and supports their implementation as a way of building capacity in organisations across all sectors engaging with children and young people.

Recommendation: CREATE strongly advocates for a continued and expanded focus on information sharing within the Fourth Action Plan and calls for a system that enables efficient sharing of data across departments, authorities, and agencies to help make the system safe and supportive for all children and young people in care.



References

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