

# Talking with young people about the National Framework

2018



Australian Government  
Department of Social Services



Australian  
Human Rights  
Commission

# Background

## What was this all about?

The Australian Government, and all state and territory Governments, put together a plan to improve the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. This is called The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 (from here on, we refer to this as the National Framework).

To make it easier to plan and implement, the National Framework was broken down into a series of smaller action plans that focussed on three year periods. This was so everyone was clear on what needed to be the key focus every three years. This booklet profiles conversations with young people regarding the Third Action Plan 2015-2018.

While the Government already had some ideas around how they wanted to make life better for children and young people, they wanted to make sure they were also getting the ideas and opinions of the experts: children and young people!

In order to do this, the Australian Government asked CREATE Foundation and the National Children's Commissioner to speak with young people. Specifically, we talked about the key things the Australian Government wanted to focus on in order to improve the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. These three strategies made up the Third Action Plan:

1. Early intervention with a focus on the early years, particularly the first 1000 days for a child;
2. Helping young people in out-of-home care to thrive into adulthood; and
3. Organisations responding better to children and young people to keep them safe.

CREATE and the National Children's Commissioner talked to groups of young people across Australia about these three strategies.

Throughout the report, the words 'some', 'many' and 'most' are used to describe the number of young people who are commenting on an issue. 'Some' means around one-quarter, 'many' means around half and 'most' means around three-quarters of young people.

## We spoke to:

323\* young people across Australia aged 15-26.

## Including:

39

Aboriginal and/or  
Torres Strait  
Islander children  
and young people

116

females

13

children and young  
people who spoke a  
language other than  
English at home

86

males

Young people had 400 messages for the Government!

\*121 did not provide demographic details

# Strategy one:

Early intervention with a focus on the early years, particularly the first 1000 days for a child

## Who did we speak to?

We spoke with 28 young people from the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, and Victoria who were either a parent or about to become a parent. Two were fathers, the rest were mothers.

## Young people were asked about:

- sources of support available for them as young parents;
- what would help them, as parents, in the future;
- their hopes for the future;
- their message to Government about how to improve the lives of young parents; and
- advice they would provide to other young parents.

## What did young people say?

Of the young people we talked to, more than half of young parents and parents-to-be were receiving support from friends and family and many had support from young parent programs and schools.

*The support I receive every day from this program is fantastic.*

Unfortunately, some young people we spoke with did not have any support and some were living in unsafe or unstable housing or were homeless.

*I was homeless at the time, with very little support.*

Some young parents and parents-to-be also revealed that they had partners who were violent and abusive.

Young parents-to-be said they were most worried about finding housing and a job, and looking after themselves and their baby. In much the same way, young people who were already parents said they would like more support to find a home and a job. They also wanted better access to affordable day care, more flexible education options, mental health support and information about the services and supports available to them and their children.

*It's ridiculous the amount of support letters you need to get on the priority housing list when you are pregnant.*

*I want to work but even if you get a job all your money goes on childcare.*

*We need to be taught stuff, not just told stuff. We need to be supported to learn how to do things, not just be handed a pamphlet.*

Some young people told us that they wanted more support for young fathers.

*The Dads need more support so they can support us (the mothers).*

*Refuges don't allow the fathers to stay with us – they split up the family just when we need that support.*

What was clear was that most young parents aspired to raise happy children and provide them with a better life.

*I want my kids to be proud of their Mum. I want them to be able to set goals and reach them. I want them to get an education.*



## Advice to other young parents or parents-to-be

*Go with your gut feeling. You always know best. If you need help ask for it, don't be shy.*

*Trust your instincts.*

*Be prepared. Enjoy it while it lasts. Don't be afraid to ask for help.*

*Keep your head up, don't give up. Get help if you need it. Don't listen to the negative input and believe in yourself.*

*Enjoy it and stick around and stay in your baby's life because it's not really that bad to be honest [young father].*

## Messages to Government – How to improve the lives of young parents

*Please make more services to help young Mums, like info packs on parenting, free classes (parenting, first aid, safe sleeping) and general mental health and other support services.*

*Single parents need more money.*

*Listen to young people. Stop cutting funding for organisations. Make organisations more accessible and easier to find.*

*You should be more aware of the young Mums out there who are suffering and struggling. More support is needed financially, support networks, case managers, more needed for housing, not just refuges....*

*More funding to support families.*

*All young Mums would appreciate a little more financial help and housing help without being judged.*



# Strategy two:

## Helping young people in out-of-home care to thrive into adulthood

### Who did we speak to?

We spoke with 213 young people from every state and territory in Australia. The young people were either under 18 and about to leave care or over 18 and had already left care.

### They were asked about:

- positives of leaving care;
- their concerns about leaving care;
- Leaving Care Plans;
- supports that would help them into the future;
- their advice to young people about to leave care; and
- their message to Government on how to improve the lives of young people leaving care.

## What did young people say?

Most of the young people we spoke with who were yet to leave care were looking forward to becoming independent and not having to rely on the Department for permission to do things or to be told where they would live. Those who had already left care felt much the same way, with most saying this was one of the best things about turning 18.

*Being able to make my own decisions and not having to ask permission from [the Department] before I can do anything. (under 18 years)*

*Finally being my own legal guardian and being able to make my own decisions. (over 18 years)*

Most of the young people we talked to who were approaching the age of leaving care were looking forward to getting a job and finding somewhere to live. Others wanted to go on to further education or start a family. Some were worried about how these things would work out, including the difficulties of getting the required documentation.

*I'm worried that I won't be able to sort out everything that I need to do. Cooking, paying bills, looking for work. (under 18 years)*

*How on Earth can I afford to rent somewhere, I don't have any money. (under 18 years)*

*I'm scared that I will have no-one to ask for help. (under 18 years)*

Young people leaving care said they would welcome additional support to help with financial stability, find housing, get a license and get a job.

*It would be great to get an info pack of stuff that I can get. Names of places and what they can do. (under 18 years)*

*I have never had to look after myself before, and I am going to need help. Lots of help! (under 18 years)*

The young people who had already left care identified that at the time they were leaving care, they had a lot of the same worries, like finding a job and somewhere to live.

*I wish people had told me about the services I know about now. (over 18 years)*

*I thought I was going to have to do everything by myself. I didn't know there are so many wonderful supports out there, if you know where to look. That's the secret! (over 18 years)*

Young people who have left care would also welcome additional supports in areas like housing and getting a licence. Those who had left care were able to provide further



insight into supports needed after care including mental health and parenting support.

Of all the young people we spoke with, only some indicated they weren't really worried about leaving care.

*I was excited actually, as I was going off to do further study, which I was really looking forward to. (over 18 years)*

*No huge hassles that can't be fixed. I have a part-time job and will be studying. (under 18 years)*



## Leaving Care Plans

Most young people we spoke with that were approaching the leaving care age found little value in their Leaving Care Plan or did not have one at all.

Around one-quarter of young people who were about to leave care said that no one was providing support to them at this important stage in their lives.

Some young people about to leave care did find their Leaving Care Plan helpful and around half said that someone outside of the Department was helping them to make arrangements for leaving care.

*I just kept asking [about a Leaving Care Plan] and eventually I got one. (under 18 years)*

*My foster Mum is helping me with everything. (under 18 years)*

*The [local youth support agency] is helping. (under 18 years)*

Around half of young people who had already left care found little value in their Leaving Care Plan or did not have one at all.

**"No, it has never come up at any planning meeting that I have been to." (under 18 years)**

Approximately one-quarter of young people reported having no-one to help them find supports when they left care.

*I asked about it [care plan] and they said they would, but by the time we really started to talk about it I was 18 and had sorted most of the stuff myself. (over 18 years)*

*Before I turned 18 I had no idea that there were many services out there that can help. You just need to find them! (over 18 years)*

Some care leavers did have a Leaving Care Plan and many said that someone outside of the Department helped them to make arrangements for leaving care.

*My caseworker busted it to get me everything I needed. She was brilliant. (over 18 years)*

*My worker was really good as she would involve me in things. I was pretty lucky though. (over 18 years)*

*My foster Mum was, and still is, the best help I ever got. (over 18 years)*

**"I turn 18 in a few months and it's freaking me out because nothing's really been organised." (under 18 years)**



## Advice to other young people about to leave care

*Get your licence and TFN and Centrelink money as soon as you can. And learn as many skills as you can so that you are more independent. (17 years)*

*Have a plan about your future. (15 years)*

*Be safe. Make good choices. Have fun. Join life. Make the effort. (17 years)*

*Never give up on your dreams. You can do it. You can't have a rainbow without a little rain. (16 years)*

*Make use of all the facilities out there. Getting assistance doesn't make you weak, it makes you smart! Smart thinking, smart future! (18 years)*

*Make sure you have a Leaving Care Plan, and somewhere to live, and a housing application has been made, and knowledge of housing options, places for support, and to be linked into post care support and brokerage available to you like TILA. (24 years)*



## Messages to Government – How to improve the lives of young people leaving care

*That we are more than what you see on a piece of paper and more than just another name and number.*

*We too need all the support to live a fulfilled and accomplished life. We too need better access to resources, to mental health and after-care services. We need you to be open and honest with us about our lives. We need you to be 110% dedicated to us, or there is no point working for us. (17 years)*

*Try to give kids in out-of-home care more choices and support all the way throughout their teens, and also when they turn 18 or older because they're still important even if they're not in home care. Try to make them feel safe as possible. Really put yourself in their shoes. (14 years)*

*Support and guidance for when you leave care. (17 years)*

*Care leavers can have a better life if they have the opportunity to have a stable placement post 18, and to gain employment or education to create a positive future and have the same opportunities your child has. (24 years)*

*Listen to the young children in care. We know how to change the system to make it fair for us. (19 years)*

*Turning 18 may mean the end of our relationship, but it is the start of my life. If you want contributing citizens to the Australian society, we need your help to start our life. Don't leave us out in the cold. (23 years)*



# Strategy three:

## Organisations responding better to children and young people to keep them safe

### Who did we speak to?

We spoke with 82 young people from the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and New South Wales. They came from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds (some of whom

had recently arrived in Australia); were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; and attending an alternative school and/or were in out-of-home care.

### We asked these young people about:

- places and spaces in which they feel unsafe or unwelcome;
- their advice to other young people newly arrived in Australia about feeling safe and welcome;
- how to make places and spaces more safe and welcoming; and
- their message to Government about how to improve young people's sense of safety when they have recently moved to Australia.

## What did young people say?

While some young people we spoke with felt safe and welcome a lot of the time, many young people reported feeling unsafe or unwelcome in public or private spaces like parks or shopping centres, online, at school and when accessing out-of-home care or related services. Young people felt unwelcome in public and private spaces due to their age or culture.

*A lot of the time it's not feeling unsafe, it's feeling unwelcome – it's the way that people look at you.*

*When I first went to mainstream school I felt lonely and isolated.*

Young people's suggestions on how to make places and spaces more safe and welcoming included things like: increased security, better maintenance, having mentors in the community and having sporting and other recreational or cultural activities organised with other young people.

*More security systems, cameras and guards.*

*It [community events] gives everybody a chance to focus on something, it's the reason everyone bonds together. It removes the barriers.*



## Advice to other young people recently arrived in Australia about feeling safe and welcome



*To be patient because at first [when] I arrived, it was [a] little hard to adapt to Australian community and society so they need to be open minded and patient and respect all people such as their ideas or beliefs.*

*Stay the way you are and improve.*

*Dear young person! I arrived just five months before. This is a different world with different people.*

*Try to be positive every day! Smile with everyone! It will help you! Find an activity where you can feel comfortable and fun (sport). Sometimes people will be rude and they will not respect you and your culture but you should stay strong! Your home always will be a good place to relax and feel good. If you feel alone just find something that will make you successful.*

## Messages to Government – How to support young people recently arrived in Australia

*Find jobs for young people; more activities for young people during school holidays; more parks.*

*Provide more opportunities for CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) people.*

*Get more young people into politics. Live equality, not just say it! Gender, race, age.*

*Let more young people work in council, as it's the same older people who are not representative to the community.*

*Australia is made up of people from all around the world. Let's keep that in mind when making decisions that affect them.*

CREATE and the National Children's Commissioner thank all of the young people who participated in these conversations. Their input has played a role in improving the safety and well-being of children and young people through the National Framework for Protecting Australia's children.



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