



create
FOUNDATION



THE PLATFORM



Hour of Power Report

A Year in Review 2015

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Who is CREATE Foundation?

CREATE Foundation (CREATE) is the national peak consumer body for children and young people with an out-of-home care experience. We represent the voices of over 43,000 children and young people currently in care, and those who have transitioned from statutory care up to the age of 25 years of age.

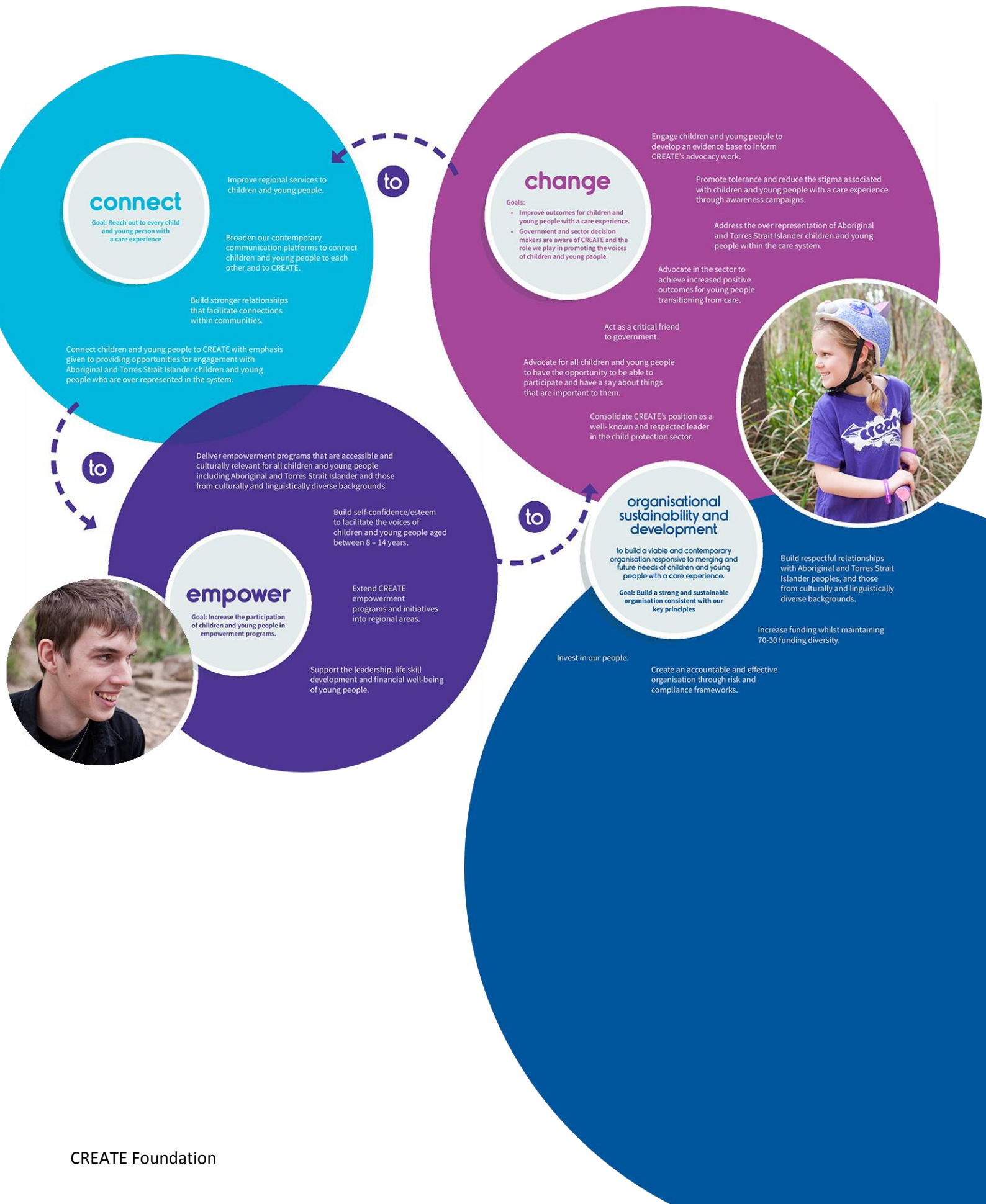
Our vision is that all children and young people with a care experience reach their full potential.

Our mission is to create a better life for children and young people in care.



CONNECT to EMPOWER to CHANGE

Strategic Plan Goals 2015 – 2017



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A special thank you to the Platform members who have contributed to The Platform in 2015.

- Naomi
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Introduction

The Platform was established by CREATE in 2015 in response to the increase of local youth advisory groups attended by young people in out-of-home care. Representatives from these groups were invited to unite to work on projects together to address the gaps in services identified by young people across Victoria.

The Platform is made up of young people from all divisions across Victoria, all of the young people are self-identified leaders with an out-of-home care experience. They meet throughout the year to look at emerging issues in their local areas and discuss solutions, actions and strategies to assist in addressing these issues.

The Platform provides a forum where the issues which matter to young people who have been in out-of-home care, can share their views, thoughts and opinions. It is also a place in which young people have the opportunity to share their messages with the decision makers. This occurs through projects and forums called the Hour of Power (HOP). The Platform is committed to finding solutions and better outcomes for children and young people in care.

The Hour of Power (HOP) events are held twice a year and provide young people with a care experience the chance to speak to officials from the Victorian Government, such as the Minister for Children Youth and Families, and the Principal Commissioner for Children and Young People and the Aboriginal Commissioner for Children and Young People. Decision makers across the child protection sector often tell CREATE that they want to hear from young people's ideas about the care system. In turn, CREATE works with children and young people in out-of-home care that want their experiences to make a difference for other children and young people in care. CREATE Victoria's Platform brings decision makers and children and young people together to talk through options and improvements to help build a better out-of-home care system for all.

Since the inception of The Platform and the HOP, over 30 young people have been become excited and passionate about what this opportunity provides them. The format of the HOP's are set up in a question and answer style, where young people are provided with the opportunity to meet with decision makers to share their views and opinions about any key service gaps, as seen by young people and how this has impacted on their experiences in care. The meetings also provide young people to share their ideas on how these gaps can be addressed.

The Platform and HOP enables young people to share their stories and hear of other young people's experiences in care. It provides a space to connect with likeminded young people and to explore complex social matters in a strengths based environment. It enables decision makers to hear valuable feedback directly from young peoples lived experiences about what is needed, what could work and what can be done in a more effective way.

"For me, The Platform and HOP is about empowering young people to have a voice and change the system. It is about turning a negative experience into something positive for others. It is also about connecting with other young people and the community. It is a chance to make a difference in the lives of other children and young people"
(Female, 21)

What is the Platform?

CREATE Victoria is aware that there are a number of organisations that work with children and young people in care and are committed to hearing from children and young people. There are groups set up for young people which provide them with an opportunity to share their stories and experiences of being in care. CREATE believes that through organisational collaboration, we can make a BIG difference for children and young people and the care system as a whole.

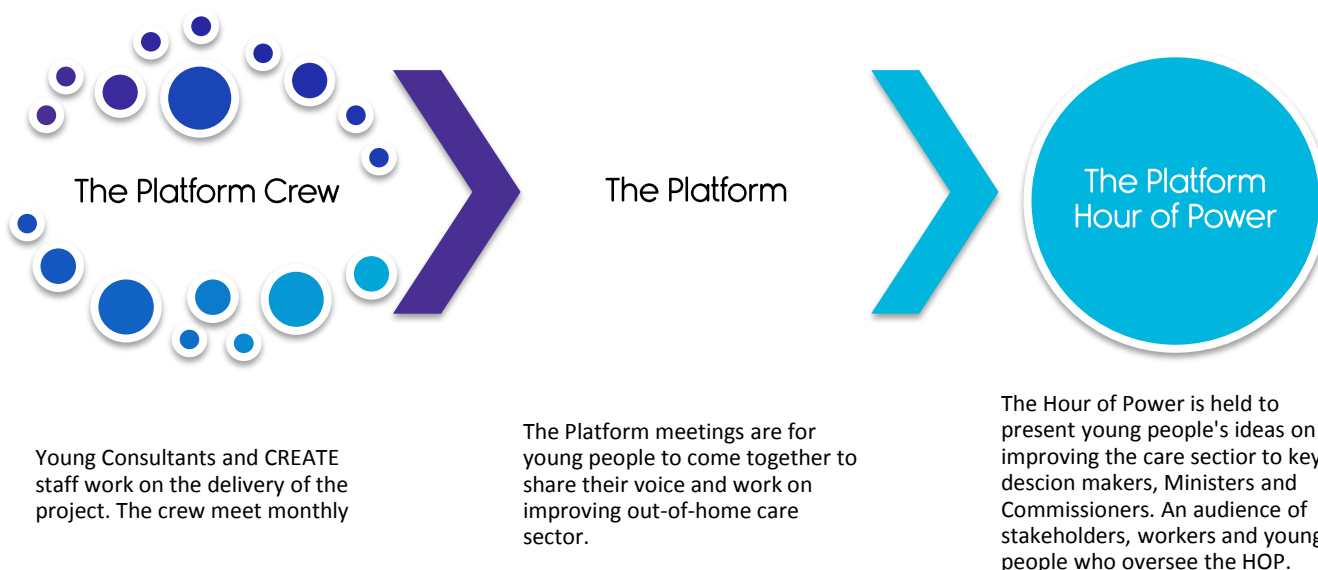
We all want to see better outcomes for children and young people with a care experience. With this in mind, we brought together a number of passionate CREATE Young Consultants who had an interest in designing a way for young people across Victoria to collectively empower themselves and other young people in order to create systemic change. This is how The Platform was formed.

The Platform is co-facilitated by CREATE Young Consultants who identify as being from a variety of groups including:

- Aboriginal;
- Torres Strait Islander;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander;
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse;
- Disability;
- Mental Health; and
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) groups in out-of-home care.

The Platform identifies the issues that the young people most wanted to address and worked with one another to explore how the issues can be viewed differently and new initiatives developed. Young people often have creative approaches which may not have been considered and have a good idea about what would work well in their lives and the lives of other young people with similar experiences.

The Platform consists of emerging leaders in their own communities, or young people who are interested in becoming leaders. They may be involved in their local youth advisory groups and are from across Victoria. They bring together the voices of children and young people in care at local, state and national levels. They share a passion and commitment to be a part of positive change.



What is the Hour of Power?

The Hour of Power (HOP) showcases young people's ideas and strategies for solving some of our community's key issues for children and young people in care

CREATE Young Consultants have been working closely with key decision makers for many years. CREATE works with the Victorian government, specifically the Department of Health and Human Services Child Protection (DHHS), Universities and the community sector to help organisations better understand what children and young people think and what they have to say on matters which relate directly to them and their lived experiences. CREATE wanted to develop a "Platform" to bring each of the players together as a starting point for youth lead conversations that encourage change. This is how the HOP was born.

'The things I love about being a Young Consultant are that it gives people who have had a tough life the chance to fight back, to advocate for others and make a change. It gives me the chance to do some right, as in my experience there have been a lot of wrongs. It gives me a purpose and it brings confidence. In the future I hope to work alongside CREATE, to fulfil the purposes put in front of me and fight for what is right. What I would say to other young people thinking about becoming a Young Consultant is that it's the first step to the BIGGEST future. It's a family within the community'

Ree, 23

The Platform group invited the Victorian Minister for Children Youth and Families, Ms Jenny Mikakos, the Principal Commissioner for Children and Young People, Mr Bernie Geary, the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, Mr Andrew Jackomos to attend a HOP panel. We also invited key people from the sector who we believed could influence change through their roles within their organisations. The HOP was facilitated by CREATE Young Consultants and the key issues, experiences and suggested solutions were driven by members of the Platform. Panel members and the audience are provided with the opportunity to respond, ask questions and generate discussions around their chosen topic. A number of sector representatives were invited to oversee the HOP were also provided with the opportunity to ask questions of the panel and provide comment.

Each HOP panel member was asked to reflect on and share their perspectives with the Platform and the audience, the panel members were also asked to provide a written response to the Platform.

Young people from other established Youth Advisory Groups in Geelong, Gippsland, Bendigo and Melbourne metropolitan areas were represented in The Platform's work.

The audience attendees included representatives from:

- The Foster Carers Association Victoria;
- The Australian Childhood Trauma Group;
- The Department of Health and Human Services;
- Wombat Housing;
- Inner Gippsland Community Area Partnerships;
- Eastern Area Partnerships;
- Melbourne University;
- Department of Education and Training;
- Centre For Excellence; and
- Oz Child Services

The focus of the first forum was on improving outcomes for young people transitioning to early adulthood and exiting the care system. In attendance were twenty professionals, eight young people and the panel. Ideas that young people brought to the first HOP included:

- Develop a new housing model where foster carers are supported to offer a transition placement for young people aged over 18 years of age as a variation to a lead tenant model. In this model the young person would remain in the carer's home;
- The need for young people to know how to access and make sense of their health records;
- Virtual schools that can assist young people in care to maintain their education and have access to higher education programs; and
- Creating a 'youth engagement' mentoring position in funded post care services. The program could utilise the expertise of care leavers to assist in promoting and engaging young people in leaving care services.

What the young people had to say

Housing and alternative solutions

The Platform's position

There are limited appropriate housing options for young people leaving care and we require supported accommodation with greater independence which allows us to make a smoother transition into adulthood. We would like to have greater support to maintain housing until we are at least 21 years of age with a variety of accommodation options available. We like the idea of being independent, however need support for this to be attainable and sustainable.

The Platform's suggested initiative

Carers are leaving the care system for a variety of reasons. These are carers who have experience and may not want to provide full time care for a child or young person however they still may have a space for a young people to stay.

- One option could be for previous carers to provide a post care placement for young people at leaving care age. This could be an opportunity for young people exiting care who no longer have the option to continue residing in their 'in care' placement. This would offer young people a continued family environment, in a new place with the support of experienced carers, and greater independence. The carer is still able to contribute as a carer however without the level of care required for a child or young person under 18 years of age who is still on an order. Post care support workers could offer additional supports to carers through this opportunity. While this would not provide a complete solution, it would provide further options for young people leaving out-of-home care.

Health and life skills

The Platform's position

Young people who are leaving care require: their health records; to know how to access their health history; and to know of any immediate health costs which are not covered through Medicare.

We require support with budgeting as we have a limited income and we need to know how to make the most of the money that we do have. While many people may think that cooking and cleaning is easy and straight forward, young people in care often don't get taught about these things and it can be challenging to know how to look after ourselves when we leave care. Often, we have extra challenges in finding work and enrolling in courses. We see these as key to improving our life outcomes and we would like additional support to increase our chances at a good career!

The Platform's suggested initiative

- While there seems to be help for health, life skills and education, we can't seem to find it easily. We would like to know of one place to find out all we need to know. CREATE's 'Sort your Life' (Sortli) app in Queensland, 'would help with this as it included information and links to the 7 paths towards independence: living skills, a place to live, health, about me, relationships, education and employment, and money. We believe that this would greatly assist Victorian young people to know how to get the support they need.

Higher education

The Platform's position

It's important that young people who have been in care finish school and go on to higher education. At times, young people in care have to move schools a lot and this means that they become behind in their school work. Young people can find it challenging to catch up, or even keep up when they have a lot of other things happening in their lives.

Since we may have missed a lot of schooling while in care or left school early, it can be challenging to get into courses at TAFE or Uni. Higher education can be expensive and we may not be able to fund this with the additional demands of supporting ourselves to be independent.

Another issue young people in care face in the education system is the stigma associated with having been in care and that they feel that schools, peers and young people themselves do not expect to achieve high outcomes. It is important to young people that schools find a way to help them keep up when they get moved and assist them to achieve what we want to do in life. Stigma can impact on our education experience, where expectations of low education outcomes, failure and high expectations can hinder our actual outcomes. Young people who have been in care should be supported to achieve the same education outcomes as other young Australians expect.

The Platform's suggested initiative

- Virtual Schools. This idea originated in the United Kingdom and has been successful. It involves schools having a person who oversees young people who have been in care and they act like a "pushy parent" bridging the gap between the child protection system and the schools. They make sure that the school is focussing on the best interests of the young person and that their education aspirations are met. They also make sure that the schools are working with the young person around planning for their career and educational future and that this is being followed up. When this was trialed, the rates of young people who went on to do higher education increased significantly.

Leaving care and post care support programs' engagement of young people

The Platform's position

Young people require more assistance to get work experience and to learn how to be high achieving employees. Post care support programs need to be well informed by young people to be effective, appropriate and to really make a difference for young people so they could really benefit from our input.

We would like to bridge this gap between us needing to develop employment skills in a workplace where we feel that we can be effective and have a unique perspective to bring. To do this we need to ensure that the services that are offered to us are well informed and appropriate for young people. While we may have young people involved with Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs) and programs with CREATE, this may not be enough to change direct service delivery and organisational cultures.

The Platform's suggested initiatives

- Agencies can offer traineeships to young people who have an OOHC experience. Where agencies offer to employ young people who have a care experience, they are valuing those who they seek to assist. We are more readily available to offer our input into the organisation and to ensure that the services offered are helpful. We are supported to make our transition into the workforce and to develop the skills that we need to move in to further paid work. The services that we would work for would also be well informed of our needs and can adequately assist our transition. We could also offer a peer support model to assist young people to become aware of and engage in services.
- Berry Street in Morwell have presented a scholarship to a young person (who is a member of the Platform), with the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, to complete a Double Diploma. This young person has been acting in an advisory capacity to this service for some years and now also has a qualification in the field.



The Panel's Response

Each panel member acknowledged that leaving care is a complex area of discussion, where there is greater support and structure needed to assist young people to transition into independent living more successfully.

Mr Pier De Carlo

Executive Director, Service Design & Operations, Department of Health and Human Services, representing the Minister for Families and Children and for Youth Affairs, Minister Jenny Mikakos

Mr De Carlo's feedback was that he valued co-design in improving policy and services to children and young people, and would like to create more opportunities to hear from young people.

Mr Carlo's written feedback stated that he appreciates that young people experience a number of challenges in accessing suitable accommodation, education and employment and he would like to see them reach their full potential. Regarding each key area identified in this report, Mr De Carlo provided the following advice:

Housing:

Mr De Carlo stated that he understands that there is a need for: placement extensions beyond 18 years of age; key leaving care workers; facilitated access to accommodation and accessibility to services until 25 years of age. Mr De Carlo advised that the majority of support required is offered by the Springboard program, housing and other existing services. Mr De Carlo stated that the DHHS will seek to strengthen access to these services over the coming year.

Health and Education:

Mr De Carlo explained that leaving care planning, as informed by the Looking After Children (LAC) framework, occurs from 15 years of age and is reviewed every six months. This includes consideration being given to young people's living and life skill development, social skills, financial management and understanding their rights and responsibilities as adults. Leaving care mentoring provides opportunities for young people to interact with adults in the community and beyond their care connections.

The Health and Education Assessment Initiative assists young people in residential care to have their health and education needs reviewed. The Pathway to Good Health Initiative in the North, West Metro and Gippsland regions enables young people to have initial health checks and assessments. Further, the DHHS is working with health professionals to promote primary access to health services and ensure children and young people's health needs are met. The DHHS are offering training to workers around children and young people's health and education needs.

Higher Education:

Mr De Carlo informed the Platform that he recognises the importance of engagement in education as providing the best chance of young people reaching their full potential. Mr De Carlo drew attention to the Early Childhood Agreement and Out-of-home care Education commitment in assisting to meet young people's education needs, however he acknowledged that more work is needed to assist children and young people who start developmentally "behind" their peers. Mr De Carlo described two approaches which were being trialled to assist with this including the Transforming Educational Achievement for Children in Home Based and Residential Care (TEACHaR) Program in the North Metro region, and the Lookout Centre in the Western region through the Department of Education and Training (DET). Mr De Carlo also drew reference to the Springboard program which assists young people with a residential care experience to meet their educational and training milestones.

Leaving Care and Post Care Support Programs Engagement of Young People:

Mr De Carlo noted that according to the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (section 16), young people are to be provided with a range of supports in the lead up to and post leaving care, including financial, legal, employment, health, counselling and housing assistance. Mr De Carlo listed the supports as identified by the DHHS as including the Leaving Care Hotline, the Leaving Care Mentoring Program, Springboard, and Tuition Fee exemptions. Mr De Carlo expressed an interest in working with CREATE to further explore the possibility of young people having greater involvement in the development of leaving care programs.

Mr Bernie Geary

Principal Commissioner for Children and Young People,

During the HOP, Mr Geary indicated that he does not want young people to be limited to working only in the OOHC sector. Mr Geary believes that young people can reach their full potential rather than limiting their knowledge and experience to one field. Mr Geary's perspective was that he would prefer that young people have the opportunity to work effectively with services to assist them to explore their development, identity and interests in the broader community.

Mr Geary's written response noted that in regards to housing assistance available for young people post care, he stated "young people are understandably concerned about their housing and accommodation options, not only short term but further into the future. These issues must not be left in the "too hard" basket'. Mr Geary noted that children and young people in OOHC are often "square pegs in round holes" in the education and health systems and often miss out as they struggle to catch up to their peers. They experience constant movements and teaching processes which do not always understand young people's needs.

Mr Geary further explained the need for a long term, consultative approach to responding to leaving care matters in a very practical and supportive ways as any 'good parent' would. He noted that this is not an option, it is what is quoted in the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*.

Mr Andrew Jackomos

Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People,

Mr Jackomos's verbal responses at the HOP indicated that he appreciated what the Platform were working towards and would like to see a greater representation of Aboriginal young people's voices. Mr Jackomos outlined the work that he is doing on Taskforce 1000.

Mr Jackomos discussed his role in Taskforce 1000, which focuses on improving outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people currently in care, by investigating in all aspects of their placement and care including their health, education, identity and connection to culture. Mr Jackomos noted that this process does not involve those who have left care, so he appreciated the insights provided by the Platform around this topic.

Mr Jackomos stated "I acknowledge the young peoples' concerns raised in the Platform's 'Leaving care summary and suggestions' document and agree in principle with the list of possible options and solutions put forward. I am however, very concerned that these issues are not adequately addressed and ongoing supports must be put in place prior to a young person leaving the OOHC system at the age of 18.

Further to this, Mr Jackomos detailed community groups and projects which are undertaking work with Aboriginal young people including the Koorie Youth Council.

In our second HOP held in December 2015, young people presented the perspective that foster care is the most preferred care type and shared their views on how foster care can be made more sustainable. In attendance were over 30 professionals, twelve young people and the panel. The young people's ideas were as follows.

What the young people had to say

Training

The Platform's position

We would like to see an increase in training provided to both foster and kinship carers. Recognising that the children and young people that they care for have unique needs, and that the sector ask carers to take on a significant role in children and young people's lives, we believe that carers require much more training about the needs of the children and young people that they care for. We also understand that carers, particularly kinship carers, can be quite isolated and believe that it is important that they are better connected. This could occur through training and we would like to help carer to understand the needs and perspectives of the children and young people they care for.

The Platform's suggested initiative

- That we have an active space to share our experience with workers and carers so they can learn from our lived experience. This includes ideas about how carers can build a better connection with us.

Supporting smoother transitions

The Platform's position

Carers take on a huge role in children and young people's lives and we believe that they should be provided with information about the children and young people that they care for, however this should be driven as much by the young person as it is by the workers and carers.

Decisions about young people moving from to any new placement, needs to be driven by young people as much as possible and for them to be included in options and decisions about placement changes. It's important for us to feel a sense of control which will allow for a more positive and sustainable transition for us.

The Platform's suggested initiatives

- A log book/journal that contains information about what young people believe their potential carers need to know about them, and the most comfortable ways they wish to tell their new carers important things about themselves. The young person would drive this experience with the support of their carers and workers. This book could be a tool used for both the young person, the carer and support worker and allow for open discussion between carers, workers and young people.
- For Placement changes to occur where children and young people are well informed about their options, are asked if they would like to leave residential care and are able to work with DHHS and their agency to allow for a smooth transition

Increasing Carers' Rights and Abilities

The Platform's position

We believe that daily occurrences make a significant difference in our experience. Barriers such as getting permission forms signed for school, haircuts, and visiting friends' houses can stop us from experiencing many every day parts of life. We would therefore like to see that it is easier for us to enjoy the lifestyle of children and young people in the general community by giving carers the ability to make decisions about these decisions.

The Platform's suggested initiative

- For young people and carers to be consulted about barriers in daily living and for these to be addressed in a way that allows children, young people and carers to sustain daily life.

Increasing Mental Health and Education Support

The Platform's position

Education and mental health are two key areas, alongside a stable and sustainable family environment, where children and young people require support in order to develop well. While we feel that the child protection system recognises this, there is still focus on traditional education and counselling which may not suit or be appropriate to meet our needs. These approaches may focus on the "problem" rather than how they can assist us to move forward. This may lead to young people isolating themselves from services.

We would like for there to be more focus on early intervention and prevention in mental health, by changing the language around mental health and education and increasing access to alternative education and therapy. For example, we would like to see more approaches like camps, extracurricular activities, mentoring, art therapy, activity and group based approaches in fostering their growth and development. Additional services and supports through schools would also be beneficial, such as programs that develop living skills.

The Platform's suggested initiatives

- A shift from mental health being viewed as a diagnostic/trauma response, to a key part of maintaining a healthy lifestyle and wellbeing. Mental health can be viewed like a continuum of wellbeing, where young people are supported to understand how this fits and impacts on their lives. This will assist young people to view getting mental health support as being something that is good for them and their future rather than seeing it as there being something wrong.
- Greater access to mental health services, as ten sessions in any given year is not enough support to help us to overcome our experiences.
- Greater access to alternative therapy/wellbeing/education options which may suit some young people better.



Embracing Targeted Care Packages (TCP)

The Platform's position

There is some support for children and young people to transition from placements, however when this occurs it is often at a time of crisis and only immediate support is provided. An area that could provide some support is in ensuring that young people have a strong social and emotional network, wherever they live. We are excited about Targeted Care Packages (TCP) however we question the extent of the support offered to sustain placements. By setting up the community around the Targeted Care Package placement, this would support better support the young person after professional support finishes working with them.

Point 19 in the TCP guideline titled '*What About the Voice of the Child or Young Person*', states that 'We should be actively engaging children and young people in residential care to make aware of the opportunities presented by TCPs and test their wishes on this opportunity'. There is also reference in the guiding principles to co-design. We would like to see young people both supported to be engaged with a community who will support and enable them to grow and develop, while also having opportunities to actively be involved in policy and service design.

The Platform's suggested initiatives

- Assistance and funds from the TCP's to be used to support a "circle" of support which is not reliant on professional workers, so that these relationships are more likely to continue as young people leave the child protection system.
Programs that provide respite, mentoring, enable young people to integrate into the community, and assistance provided to carers and extended networks are key in enabling this support.
- Ensuring co-design is engrained through all levels of the service sector.



The Panel's Response

Minister Mikakos

Minister for Children Youth and Families

Minister Mikakos valued the opportunity to hear directly from young people about their care experiences and initiatives what they see would best suit them. Minister Mikakos's responses to the five areas identified by young people are as follows:

Training for Foster and Kinship Care

Minister Mikakos informed that supporting foster and kinship carers is a priority for the Victorian Government with them announcing \$3.2 million in funding to attract and recruit new carers and support existing carers. The 'Fostering Connections' program was launched in January 2016 to increase the community's awareness of foster care. Provisions of better support for carers is being progressed through a new foster carers manual, the establishment of carer advisory groups, the development of a Foster Carer Engagement Strategy, a new standardised feedback and complaints mechanism and enhanced training opportunities. Training opportunities will involve a particular focus on assisting young people with complex needs, in addition to looking at alternative avenues for this training, including on-line training and webinars.

Minister Mikakos informed that increased opportunities have been made available for kinship carers to access training, including assistance for them to develop self-care strategies, positive parenting approaches and culturally competent training. Minister Mikakos has commissioned a review of kinship care and awaits this feedback to identify further training needs. Minister Mikakos also welcomed the suggestion of young people having a role in this training and has requested that her department contact CREATE to discuss this further.

Provision of information to carers about the children and young people in their care/increased information for carers to support smoother transitions

Minister Mikakos acknowledged the importance of carers being properly empowered and engaged so that they provide the best possible support to children and young people. Minister Mikakos believes that the Carer Advisory Groups which have recently commenced will provide a platform for carers to also advocate for change, discuss issues and provide feedback directly to the government and sector. The Foster Carer Engagement Strategy is also aimed to encourage carers to be involved in assisting children and young people to make decisions. Minister Mikakos believes that the Platform's suggestion of a log book would provide an excellent resource to support the relationship between carers and the children and young people in their care.

Carers capacity to make decisions about the children and young people in their care/increasing carer rights and abilities

Minister Mikakos advised that changes were made in November 2014 to allow carers to have greater decision making abilities which allow them to make day to day decisions for the children and young people in their care. Once authorised, carers can support these activities as they see appropriate. Minister Mikakos further stated that "it is in the best interests of children in out-of-home care to feel that they belong, and to experience care as safe and comfortable. Authorising carers to make certain decisions assists with the normalising the experience of children in out-of-home care and supports their access to similar care and opportunities available to other children".

Increasing mental health and education support

Minister Mikakos identified a number of initiatives which are designed to support the mental health and education needs of children and young people in out-of-home care. This include the following: *Roadmap to Reform: Strong Families, Safe Children*. This long term reform aims to examine the continuum of the system from prevention through the out-of-home care and includes mental health and education areas. The project aims to practically prevent neglect abuse and neglect by intervening early while also ensuring the futures of children and young people who cannot live at home.

Victoria's 10 year mental health plan

Victoria's 10 year mental health plan was announced in November 2015 which focuses on long term prevention in mental health. It includes reducing the prevalence of mental health and suicide rates, reducing stigma and discrimination, ensuring better access to high quality mental health services and providing more choice about treatment, rehabilitation and support.

Out-of-home care governance

Minister Mikakos raised her understanding of the need to strengthen monitoring of the out-of-home care sector, including monitoring mental health and education initiatives for children and young people in care. A reform agenda has been developed to provide a platform to discuss ideas and receive feedback and input from stakeholders. The out-of-home care Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) began in early 2015 so that community sector leaders could provide Minister Mikakos with direct advice and feedback. The Foster Care Working Group meets regularly to collaboratively develop out-of-home care improvement initiatives and the out-of-home care strategic oversight group is in the process of being re-established. Minister Mikakos also informed that she has greatly benefited from the insights and discussions with young people at the HOP and through roundtables.

Education roundtable

Minister Mikakos informed that it is her government's commitment to establish Victoria as the Education State, where success in education does not depend on a person's background or where they live. The key themes relevant to children and young people from out-of-home care from an education roundtable, held in June 2015 included the following:

- barriers created by low aspirations for educational achievement
- impact of placement instability on education outcomes and formation of positive relationships
- Need to utilise universal services to strengthen early intervention supports
- Need for improved data monitoring and information sharing
- need to focus more attention on early years and transitions from out-of-home care

Minister Mikakos recognised the importance of shared responsibility between the Department of Education and Training and the DHSS and identified a number of new and existing initiatives to support this including:

- Early Childhood Agreement for Children in out-of-home care and the out-of-home care Education Commitment
- the TEACHaR model
- the State-wide Health and Education Initiative
- the LOOKOUT Centre

Student Support

The Springboard program is funded to provide intensive education, training and vocational support to residential care leaves aged 16 to 21, in addition to Youth Foyers providing accommodation to students who are unable to live at home.

Embracing Targeted Care Packages (TCPs)

Minister Mikakos informed that the intention of the Targeted Care Packages (TCPs) is that they will be co-designed with young people and that in the 2016 review, will look at incorporating the voice of the young person and carer's feedback in improving the program. This will include looking at better communication about TCP's to ensure that the sector are better aware of the opportunities that TCP's present.

Mr Frank Vincent

Acting Principal Commissioner for Children and Young People

Mr Vincent informed that his impression from The Platform was that the requests and expectations of the young people were moderate and that they are asking for basic things which they shouldn't even have to consider asking for. Training for carers is fundamental and obviously needed given the backgrounds that young people with an out-of-home care experience are coming from.

Mr Vincent raised his concern that children and young people are moved as often as they are and with little information, which is expected to cause them mass disruption. It would be assumed that it would be basic understanding that a child or young person should have as little personal dislocation as possible, however this is not the situation. This adds to the damage and sense of alienation that children and young people experience, with short and long term affects.

In regards to ensuring carers rights, some things are being done to allow carers to meet the daily needs of children and young people. It is important to keep an eye on carers so that children are protected, however not to the extent that it limits the child.

Mr Vincent raised that he has a particular interest in the mental health and education needs of children and young people. He informed that he has made a request to DHHS to find out what the practical issues are in meeting children and young people's needs in these areas so that he can ensure that steps are taken to assist with this. In particular around leaving care, there is a huge amount more that can be done to support this.

Further, Mr Vincent advised that if we regard our obligation as a society to provide children and young people's basic needs we are giving ourselves a limited role. We are not making a real attempt to ensure that children and young people's potential is able to be realised, so they see themselves as the bottom of society. A common feature for children and young people who have an out-of-home care experience is that they have no sense of self-esteem. Mr Vincent stated that "they have got to have that sense somewhere within them that they are loveable, right in the centre of their being. They have a sense of worthlessness which comes from abuse and rejection and we aggravate it".

Mr Vincent informed that that foundational word is "respect". We cannot expect loyalty and value from others if we don't show it. It is remarkable how low young people's expectations are. Every time we devalue their experience we add to their lack of self-esteem. These basic things that The Platform consider should never be an issue in the first place.



Ms Kylie Belling

Senior Policy Advisor, Aboriginal Commission for Children and Young People

Ms Belling's feedback was that it is really important for carers to have cultural support and that this is a key responsibility for any carers taking on Aboriginal children and young people to ensure that they can enjoy cultural connection as a priority in their development.

Ms Belling believes that support for children and young people in general is important so that they become resilient in dealing with the insecurity that can occur for them in their experiences. Ms Belling's question was about how we ensure this in a way that minimises the number of placements that children and young people experience while also enabling as much information as is appropriate to be shared between carers and young people. This needs to occur in a way that empowers the young person and promotes their placement.

Ms Belling informed that as a system we need to trust that carers have the best interests of the child or young person in their care at heart and that they would treat the child or young person as a good parent would. For this to occur, we should give carers the autonomy, rights and responsibilities that a parent would have without diminishing the rights of the child or young person. We need to trust carer's ability to make sensible decisions for children and young people.

Ms Belling believes that as a system, we need to ensure that our practice is trauma informed. Children and young people, particularly those with an out-of-home care experience, require as much support to grow into healthy young adults as anyone else, if not more so to assist them to build from their early trauma filled experiences. Our focus should be on focussing on trauma informed positive practice to assist children and young people to build their resilience.

Ms Belling advised that it is important to have a holistic approach to raising children and young people. If it takes a village to raise a child, we need to make sure that there is a one stop shop where children and young people are able to access all the services that they require and in an environment where they do not have to go from one door to another and question who they have to speak to in order to get the support they need. They need to be able to go to one place and for all of the decisions that need to be made to assist the child or young person to be made there and then.



Review of the first HOPs

Feedback from the panel indicated that the HOP provided a valuable insight into the priorities and concerns of young people who transitioning from care and discussed alternate ideas to better assist young people in and out of care.

Having successfully completed our first year, The Platform and HOP have identified a number of areas where further attention and change is required. We would like to further explore post care housing options with the Foster Carers Association of Victoria (FCAV), taking into consideration carers who may no longer wish to care for a young child, however may have the space and willingness to support a young person leaving care.

As part of The Platform and the HOP, the Lookout Centre concept has been funded in the Western region of Victoria and CREATE has built collaborative partnerships to help support this initiative. CREATE and The Platform will continue to encourage post care agencies to actively involve young people in their planning and service delivery.

The Platform, the HOP and CREATE Foundation encourage all agencies and organisations who support children and young people in out-of-home care to consider and challenge how they work and how best to involve children and young people in the work they do. In order for change to occur and for children and young people to have the opportunity to reach their potential, all services and agencies who work closely with children and young people need to reflect this engagement in their agency structures, policies practices to ensure that children and young people's views, opinions and ideas are accurately implemented at all levels within their organisations.

The Platform is committed to working alongside every organisation and professional to support and reflect on their practice to help implement the ideas detailed in this report.



"I've been lucky enough to have been involved with the HOP since it for started a few HOPs ago. I have loved being a part of the HOP as it has allowed me to have a platform to speak my voice and know that I have been heard. Being able to speak to those in a position of power who can make the changes that will make sure kids in care grow up in a safe environment, has been a great privilege but has also let me know that my voice really matters to them and what I have to say actually means something. This fills me with pride and joy within myself. I will be ageing out of CREATE soon and I couldn't ask for a better way to move forward with a new chapter in my life then with another HOP"

Rizz,25

Feedback from The Platform

The Platform and HOP have been an incredibly rewarding experience for the young people involved. Young people have immensely enjoyed the opportunity to develop a position around some of the most important issues affecting their lives and to consider new alternatives to these. Platform members come from a range of backgrounds, some with many years' experience in advocating for young people's rights, and others who are in the earlier stages. Each young person spoke about finding the format of the HOP to be beneficial for them to access and approach topics alongside those who have influence in the sector. They also spoke highly about the experience of working as a team with a shared vision.

Given that young people initiated, invited and drove the agenda with attendees visiting young people in their space, the young people felt a sense of ownership and commitment to the process. In addition, Young Consultants involved in The Platform would like to see their reach and membership increased to include a greater geographic and cultural demographic. Ideas for this include Youth Advisory Groups being initiated in the Gippsland, Southern Metropolitan and Outer Eastern Areas and to make stronger connections with Aboriginal and Indigenous groups.

Feedback from sector representatives present

The audiences of the HOP were given the opportunity to ask questions of panel members and Young Consultants. Services represented in the audience have included DHHS, Wombat Housing, the Australian Childhood Trauma Group, Eastern Community Area Partnerships, Inner Gippsland Community Area Partnerships, Foster Carers Association Victoria, Department of Education and Training, Oz Child and Melbourne University. Feedback from our audience is that the HOP needs to be expanded into a forum with a bigger venue which can allow more people to attend and where there can be time for greater involvement and workshopping of the ideas suggested.

Where to from here?

The Platform view the ideas and suggestions as detailed in this report as being a starting point which they anticipate can assist in shaping new initiatives and to shape policy and practice. Having considered some key issues affecting young people in regards to leaving care and sustaining foster placements, The Platform's Young Consultants have been given a number of speaking and presenting opportunities. They have presented on forums in regional area partnerships and consulted in projects in their local areas.

Some of The Platform's involvement includes the following:

- Being involved in the appointment of the Principal for the Lookout Centre, and continued support of the program, allowing for a young person's perspective
- Several of The Platform's Young Consultants are assisting post care and OOHC programs in their local regions including Gippsland, Bendigo, Geelong and metropolitan Melbourne to improve practice
- The Sortli App is due to be released in Victoria in 2016 to enable young people to access Victorian leaving care service details through their mobile phone
- A team of Young Consultants worked on the Foster Carer Recruitment Project with DHHS
- Ministers Round Tables to further explore how policy and services can be strengthened



The Platform and HOP in 2016

A group of Young Consultants from The Platform worked alongside The Department of Health and Human Services in April to May 2016 on the Foster Carer Recruitment Project. This involved them reviewing the new Foster Carers manual, hosting an art day for children and young people to make art work to be published in the manual, writing the foreword and developing a Podcast about their care experiences and involvement in the project. This allowed them to form as a group and to delve into a project that they were passionate about.

Based on feedback from The Platform 2015, we have been asked to develop the Hour of Power into a larger forum where the ideas suggested by Young People can be workshopped following the Hour of Power. We are now developing this platform for the sector to share their ideas and to create bigger conversations to start change in the sector.

We encourage you to support the voice of young people through local youth advisory groups and to connect with CREATE to have their say about what's important to them. CREATE's youth advisory group are looking for more members who can participate in a variety of roles, including in the platform and Hour of Power. Leadership training through our 'Speak Up' 'SUP' program is available regularly throughout the year and all CREATE services are free for children and young people. Young people are able to stay connected with CREATE until their 26th birthday through clubCREATE. We believe that everyone's voice is important and as a sector we need to listen.

For more information you can contact CREATE's Victorian office on 03 9918 0002 or go to www.create.org.au

"Life isn't measured by how many breaths you take, it's measured by how many breath taking moments you have"

George Carlin

"To me there are both positive and negative moments. Being in care, my life was different to everyone else that I knew, it took a long time to understand who I was. But CREATE showed me a way to make a difference and give people breath taking moments. Through the Foster Care Manual Project, the Platform, the HOP and various other activities, I've been able to grow and contribute to the system to make it better, by sharing both my positive and negative experiences"

(Male, 21)

"I have been involved in the hour of power twice now and once to observe how it all works. I just can't get enough. The experience alone is incredible and so powerful for young people and organisations... The planning for Hour of Power is my favourite to see all the staff and young people put all our minds together and come up with amazing ideas struggles and strategies. It has sucked to feel like we have no voice or it just gets dismissed gives me a sense of helplessness. But with the Hour of Power all those feelings disappear and gets replaced with passion excitement and meaningful advice. I'm totally inspired and empowered and can't wait to see the outcome and results as I've seen many before."

Ree, 23



CREATE Foundation Limited
ABN 69 088 075 058

Reply Paid 87740
SYDNEY NSW 2000



www.create.org.au



1800 655 105



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1800 655 105 is a free-call number that young people in care and their carers can use. However, there may be fees charged if calling from a mobile.