

## MEDIA RELEASE

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people in care

# NEW INDEPENDENT SURVEY REVEALS THAT DESPITE THE RHETORIC, ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN IN CARE ARE OFTEN UNAWARE OF CULTURAL SUPPORT PLANS

**Sydney, 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2019**, today CREATE Foundation launches the largest independent survey of children and young people with an out-of-home care experience. The results indicate that over half of young people surveyed remain unaware of their care plan, experience placement instability and lack the appropriate channels to have input into the plan for their own life.

Since 2006, CREATE Foundation has informed government and the child protection sector through independent consultations and research with children and young people with a care experience (i.e., foster, kinship or residential care). Learning about the experiences of children and young people growing up in care is vital as a means of informing the sector about what is working and where improvements are most urgent.

The latest survey is the only one of its kind being via **direct consultation** with children and young people about their care experience under the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020*. The lack of access to those who are currently living in care presents a significant challenge and highlights the need for improvement to assist services reach those who need it most.

The highly anticipated report, titled: ***Out-of-Home Care in Australia: Children and Young People's Views After 5 Years of National Standards<sup>1</sup>*** is a follow up from CREATE's 2013 independent Report: *Experiencing Out-of-Home Care in Australia: The Views of Children and Young People*. This study concentrated on placement issues and levels of participation, and dealt with all life domains including education, health, relationships (family and friends), identity, and culture.

In the latest survey, over 1,200 children and young people shared invaluable insights into what is working well and what still needs to be improved in the child protection system. The survey focussed on these key areas: knowledge about care planning, having a say in their plan for their life, if young people feel safe and secure in their placement, and feeling prepared to transition to independence (leave care).

The survey found that children and young people clearly indicated it **was important to them to have a say about decisions affecting their care experience, particularly concerning their daily activities, where they lived, and their contact with family members.**

One of the most alarming crises our nation faces is Aboriginal children being 11 times<sup>2</sup> more likely to be placed in out-of-home care than non-Aboriginal children. CREATE's survey revealed that of those, two thirds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care did not feel connected to their culture, and only 18% had cultural care plans in place.

A 19-year-old Aboriginal woman with a care experience said: *"I feel that with the changes occurring with adoption laws, it isn't going to make things better. When you are taken away at any age, you lose your identity, connection to country and culture which can be isolating. It gets harder and I believe restoration back to community and family is important, to know who you are and where you're from."*

### **national new south wales office**

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*“With a National Child Protection Framework in place, what will it take for culturally appropriate and actionable plans to bring about the support for families and the systemic change needed to turn things around?” asks CREATE Foundation Chief Executive, Ms Jacqui Reed.*

A comprehensive set of findings will be revealed at the official launch, with key insights shown below:

- 44% of respondents reported being aware of having a case plan, but only 43% of these had been involved in its preparation
- Children and young people in home-based care tended to have a more stable care experience than in Residential Care or Independent Living; Kinship Care respondents reported the most stable placements, with three quarters of these meeting the Standard.
- 81% of respondents in this survey indicated they felt happy in their current placement; 93% also reported feeling safe and secure.
- Carers were significantly more involved than were caseworkers in helping children and young people maintain family contact, and helping young people in their education needs.
- 36% of respondents with siblings in care were separated from all their brothers and sisters (split placements); SA again reported the greatest proportion of split placements.

CREATE’s Executive Director of Research and survey author, Dr Joseph McDowall spoke about how the reports, over the past five years, addressing the national standards clearly show where to direct focus to improve the out-of-home care system in Australia.

*“Children and young people want more meaningful participation in the decision-making that affects them directly. They need to be more involved in all aspects of life-course planning, particularly when considering their future as autonomous members of the community.”*

*“Relationships with carers are recognised as critically important, however, more resources, encouraging reflective practice and team building, must be directed to enabling caseworkers to perform their role effectively in addressing the needs of those for whom they are responsible.”*

*“Finally, greater effort must be expended by governments to ensure that staff in all residential care facilities are trauma-informed and trained in providing essential therapeutic support.”*

Ms Jacqui Reed, CREATE Foundation Chief Executive shared that, in spite of the challenges of accessing records where children and young people can be contacted, the survey succeeded in reaching greater than 1200 participants, with results clearly illustrating the important role of carers in keeping children safe.

*“The new survey found that most children and young people will have 3 to 6 case workers and that foster carers are their greatest support,” commented Ms Reed. “Their care and attention instil a positive and stable adult influence in a young person’s life, so it is vital to see the system establish robust tools and supports for carers to strengthen the likelihood of placement stability and they are adequately equipped to keep doing a great job.”*

The results have revealed a wide range of domains which require focus and attention to strengthen a system under strain. What remains disheartening for CREATE Foundation is to continually see that not only are young people growing up with the extreme challenges of placement instability, there remains a profound lack of opportunities for young people to have a say in important decisions that affect their lives and to feel they are heard (68%).

**INVITATION:** Be the first to hear the results by RSVP’ing to join CREATE’s national launch event 10-11.30am, Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2019. Presenters include CREATE Chief Executive, **Ms Jacqui Reed**; Executive Director of Research and report author, **Dr Joseph McDowall**, sector and government representatives, as well as hearing powerful stories shared by CREATE’s **young people** on their experiences, followed by a lively discussion around how the child protection sector can work together to improve the lives of children and young people in out-of-home care.

Details: Morgan Stanley Offices, Level 26, Chifley Tower, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney, NSW.

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CREATE Foundation is the national consumer body representing the voices of children and young people with an out-of-home care experience (including kinship care, foster care and residential care). CREATE develops policy and research to report on and advocate for a better care system. For more information please visit [www.create.org.au](http://www.create.org.au) or 1800 655 105

**Media Enquiries:** To discuss a story idea regarding the new report, interview with Jacqui Reed or a young person, contact Leigh White via 0431 932 122 ; or Andrea Doney via 0402 050 418 or [andrea@admarcoms.com.au](mailto:andrea@admarcoms.com.au)

View CREATE's past reports here: <http://create.org.au/publications/>

Source: 1. McDowall, J. J. (2018). *Out-of-home care in Australia: Children and young people's views after five years of National Standards*. Sydney: CREATE Foundation.

Source 2: *Child protection Australia 2017–18 report*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 8/3/19.

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