

# BEING IN CARE IN AUSTRALIA: FIVE YEARS AFTER THE NATIONAL STANDARDS

## YOUNG PERSON'S REPORT

CREATE Foundation 2018



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## Contact CREATE Foundation in your State or Territory on 1800 655 105

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**WE REPRESENT THE VOICES OF ALMOST 46,000 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE CURRENTLY IN CARE, AND THOSE WHO HAVE TRANSITIONED FROM CARE UP TO THE AGE OF 25.**

### Who are we?

CREATE Foundation represents the voices of children and young people in Australia with an out-of-home care experience. A crucial part of what we do is research. We explore what needs to be done to create a better care system and this in turn influences what CREATE tells governments they need to do to improve the lives of children and young people in care.

## National Standards

Standard	Descriptor
<b>Standard 1</b>	Children and young people will be provided with stability and security during their time in care.
<b>Standard 2</b>	Children and young people participate in decisions that have an impact on their lives.
<b>Standard 3</b>	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities participate in decisions concerning the care and placement of their children and young people.
<b>Standard 4</b>	Each child and young person has an individualised plan that details their health, education and other needs.
<b>Standard 5</b>	Children and young people have their physical, developmental, psychosocial and mental health needs assessed and attended to in a timely way.
<b>Standard 6</b>	Children and young people in care access and participate in education and early childhood services to maximise their educational outcomes.
<b>Standard 7</b>	Children and young people up to at least 18 years are supported to be engaged in appropriate education, training and/or employment.
<b>Standard 8</b>	Children and young people in care are supported to participate in social and/or recreational activities of their choice, such as sporting, cultural or community activity.
<b>Standard 9</b>	Children and young people are supported to safely and appropriately maintain connection with family, be they birth parents, siblings or other family members.
<b>Standard 10</b>	Children and young people in care are supported to develop their identity, safely and appropriately, through contact with their families, friends, culture, spiritual sources and communities and have their life history recorded as they grow up.
<b>Standard 11</b>	Children and young people in care are supported to safely and appropriately identify and stay in touch, with at least one other person who cares about their future, who they can turn to for support and advice.
<b>Standard 12</b>	Carers are assessed and receive relevant ongoing training, development and support, in order to provide quality care.
<b>Standard 13</b>	Children and young people have a transition from care plan commencing at 15 years old which details support to be provided after leaving care.

## What was this research all about?

CREATE believes that the best people to ask about how to improve the care system are the experts – children and young people with a care experience!

To understand what is working well and not so well in out-of-home care, CREATE developed a survey based on the National Standards for Out-of-Home Care (National Standards).

The **National Standards** were written by the Australian Government and include areas that are important to the wellbeing of all children and young people in care. These areas include things like participation, education, health, being connected to family and heaps more.

These areas have standards attached to them which set out the kind of treatment and support that a child or young person should expect when they are in care. Each standard also has guidelines on how it can be measured to make sure young people are receiving the care they deserve.

A national set of standards is really important because every state and territory child protection department is run differently. By introducing a national standard of care, it allows for comparison between departments all over Australia to see how they are meeting the needs of children and young people in care.

For example, the second standard in the National Standards is about young people participating in decisions about their lives. This is measured by looking at how many young people say they have opportunities to have a say and feel listened to. This number can be compared against other states and territories to see how many young people feel they can have a say. We would then know that the system was working really well if 100% of young people report that they could have a say.

In 2013 CREATE used the National Standards to develop a survey and talked to 1069 young people about their life in care. We then wrote a report called *Experiencing Out-of-Home Care in Australia: The Views of Children and Young People*.

In 2015, the Government also did their own survey also using the National Standards to see what needed to be improved in child protection systems. This was really useful because it allows for comparison between what young people report to CREATE and what the Government data says. We will call this report the Government report.

It's been five years since CREATE did their first survey, so CREATE wanted to do a follow-up survey to see whether things are better, worse, or have stayed the same.

**57%** Female participants

**43%** Male participants

**34%** Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander participants

**27%** Participants with a disability

## Who did we talk to?

This time CREATE talked to 1275 young people about being in care. CREATE made sure that we heard the voices of as many young people as possible and some of the state departments helped us get in touch with young people.

The survey could be completed online or by speaking with a CREATE worker on the phone or face-to-face. We talked with young people from every state and territory in Australia.

## Results

Young people were asked questions about their placement history, whether they could participate in important decisions, their experiences at school, family contact, whether they felt connected to culture and heaps more. There were lots of interesting findings which can be found in the main report on our website.

This Young Person's Report is a snapshot of the main things we found from the survey. CREATE found that there were some areas that were working well and some areas that weren't working well according to CREATE's 2013 survey, the Government report, and our new report.

## What's working well?

### YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL SAFE AND SECURE

Children and young people living in out-of-home care should feel secure, safe and stable in their placements. This is important for them to achieve the best outcomes in life, and is Standard One in the National Standards.

It is really positive that all three reports found that most young people felt safe and secure. In 2018, CREATE found that almost 93% of young people felt safe and secure in their current placement!

There were some differences found across the states and territories. More young people (96%) felt safe and secure in Tasmania and Western Australia, and the lowest number (86%) was in the ACT.

**93%**  
**OF CHILDREN  
AND YOUNG  
PEOPLE SAID  
THEY FELT SAFE  
AND SECURE!**

**"It's going really well – they've put me with people who love me."  
Male, 11**

**"Child safety have helped me to get away from all the crap. I've had stability and I feel safer."  
Male, 17**

### So what makes a good and bad placement?

81% of children and young people we spoke to were happy in their current placement. The things that made a placement good for young people were often related to the carers and whether they were loving, respectful and understanding. Young people said good placements were those where they had their needs met, like having enough food, but also felt like part of the family and accepted.

**People that love them as their own and treat them as part of their family. (Female, 18)**

Placements that weren't good, where young people didn't feel safe, were those where the carers were uncaring and unfair, or where young people felt abused and neglected. Other young people said bad placements were those that didn't suit their needs – like there was too many kids in the home or they felt bullied by other kids.

**Having the biological kids of your foster parents not liking you because you are a foster kid, they made it very uncomfortable. (Female, 17)**

### How stable are placements?

While most young people were happy in their current placements, most weren't happy about how many placements they had lived in, and the lots of moving around that went along with this.

**I really don't like moving places and I don't like to move away from my brothers because there is really nothing to do without my brothers I have no-one else to play with and that's what I like to do- play. (Male, 10)**

**The constant move is very unsettling especially if it's a group home that only lets you stay there for a short amount of time. It gives uncertainty for the young person. (Female, 17)**

Another measure of Standard 1 is how many young people have only one or two placements while in care. Around 60% of young people in NSW and TAS had only had one or two placements. Young people in the NT had the most placement instability.

Overall only 52% of young people said they had lived in only one or two placements (e.g. a foster, kinship or residential home) which means a large group of young people experience instability. The government needs to do more to make placements more stable and the young people CREATE talked to had some suggestions on how to do this, including the idea to recruit more carers and making sure they have enough training and support.

**Getting in contact with caseworkers. Carers having more training and knowing about our background. Carers knowing how to help teenagers.**

**Some houses have too many kids and they really should check this. (Female, 15)**

**More carers!!! And more support for them and keep supporting children and young people. (Female, 17)**

### YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE A CONNECTION TO AT LEAST ONE FAMILY MEMBER

A lot of young people throughout the survey talked about how important it was for them to have contact with their family. Having a relationship with family members is important for a young person to develop an identity and know where they come from, but also feel like they belong.

**Probably just being separated from your other siblings because that was the hardest thing, not actually living with them and not ending up living with them. (Female, 17)**

All three reports found a high number of young people feel like they have a connection with at least one family member, and they expect to maintain this connection, which is Standard 9.

In 2018 CREATE found that 96% of young people felt they had a connection with at least one family member.

**81%**

**were happy in their current placement but many were not happy about moving a lot"**

**96%**

**of young people felt they had a connection with at least one family member**



## YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ABLE TO SAY THAT ONE SIGNIFICANT ADULT CARES ABOUT THEM

CREATE 2018 found that 90% of young people were able to identify a significant person in their life they could talk to if something happened that they were concerned about, and they

could depend on this person over time (Standard 11). Similar results were found in CREATE's 2013 report (93%), and in the Government Report (97%).

Most children and young people said their special person was their carer (36%), followed by their friends (16%) and then their grandparents (11%). Only 5% nominated their caseworker.

### What else did young people tell us about family contact?

A lot of young people tell us it's important for them to live with their brothers and sisters, and research tells us it can make life better for young people when they do. Despite this we found in our 2018 survey that 36% of young people who had siblings in care were separated from all their brothers and sisters.

Over 40% of young people in SA were separated from their siblings, and being separated from siblings was also really

common for young people living in residential care. More young people lived with all their siblings in kinship care, and in WA and VIC.

Siblings were the most contacted birth family members, followed by grandparents. A lot of young people (almost half) said they never saw their father. Young people in the NT were least satisfied with their family contact arrangements, and most wanted to see all their relatives more, especially siblings. This was also the case for young people in residential care.

# 36%

of young people with siblings in care were separated from their brothers and sisters

# ALMOST HALF

never saw their fathers

## What's not working so well?

### Few young people participate in decision-making or feel listened to

National Standard 2 states that children and young people in care should participate in decisions that have an impact on their lives. This can include decisions about where they will live, what school they might go to, and how much contact they have with family members.

CREATE asked children and young people whether they felt they were given the chance to have a say in decisions that affected their lives, and whether they felt listened to. Only about two-thirds of young people felt they could have a say in decisions reasonably often, and only felt heard and listened to about 70% of the time. This is similar to what CREATE found in 2013 (63%) and what the Government found in 2015 (67%).

Young people in general felt they could have a say in decisions about day-to-day things (like what to have for dinner), recreational activities, education and family contact, but had little say in decisions about placement.

**Why can't the department listen to me? I feel unsafe in my current situation and just want to live with my pop. (Male, 17)**

While older young people felt more involved in decision making, young people who lived in a residential home, lived independently, or lived in the ACT or in the NT, felt less heard.

**Department really needs to involve young people in the decisions and choices about their life. (Female, 17)**

**"I don't want to go to residential care but they say there's nothing else. Because it's all they have got, I have to go. No one tells me what to expect. No one cares that I don't want to go. I like the carers I'm with now, but they are old and I have to leave at the end of March." Male, 14**

### Why might young people not feel listened to?

One way young people can speak up is by making a complaint about how they are being cared for. About three-quarters of the young people CREATE spoke to for our 2018 report said they knew how to complain, but a third said they had changed their mind about making a complaint because they were scared about what might happen.

**I was worried about the consequences, such as my carer being angry if she found out before it was sorted. (Female, 14)**

The relationship that young people have with their caseworkers is important in helping them voice how they think and feel about things. However, only 64% of young people felt they could access their caseworker as often as they wanted.

Going to formal meetings can also be an important way for young people to have their voices heard but young people reported attending these meetings only 38% of the time, and felt they weren't listened to half the time.

Young people also told CREATE that their caseworkers changed quite often. Most young people reported they had between three and six caseworkers. When there has been lots of changes in caseworkers, young people may not feel comfortable talking to their caseworker if they don't know them well.

**It is very bad that all the time when a child is going in and out of home care, they are always getting brand new caseworkers, and they then have to build a new relationship with him or her, which I do not agree on doing, due to your having to then share all your own private and confidential information, with a stranger! (Male, 13)**

Young people also told us caseworkers were sometimes not helpful when young people did ask for help. Young people said some caseworkers weren't friendly, caring or responsive.

**I'll ask a question and she'll say to come back to it, but it never gets dealt with. She seems as though she doesn't care much and she doesn't put in a lot of effort. Her communication and timing is very poor—she'll tell my carer about an appointment the night before. (Female, 15)**

Good caseworkers were those who were friendly, responsive, honest and reliable.

**My caseworker is amazing! She helps get funding for stuff. She's always checking on us to make sure we're happy and safe. I feel like I could talk to her about anything, and I love that we got the most awesome caseworker we could ask for! (Female, 12)**

More needs to be done to remove the barriers that stop young people having a say and help them feel comfortable to speak up!

**Gotten me the financial support needed for certain school activities. Asked me if I am OK. Told me information about my past that has been useful. (Male, 16)**

**Many young people don't feel prepared or supported for transitioning from care**

Transitioning from out-of-home care to living independently can be a challenging time for young people. Young people often need emotional and practical support to learn skills to live independently.

Caseworkers and carers can play an important role in making sure young people feel ready to transition to independence. However, CREATE found that only 64% of young people aged 15-18 were reasonably confident about finding accommodation, looking after their health, finding a job, and budgeting.

Similar results were found in CREATE's previous report (63%) and in the Government report (58%).

## WHAT ARE YOUNG PEOPLE MOST CONCERNED ABOUT?

When asked to score how concerned they felt about leaving care from 0 (not at all concerned) to 100 (very concerned), the average was 37, meaning that young people are only a little concerned. But this might be because they don't realise all the things they need to think about.

Some young people though reported experiencing stress and anxiety, especially about finding a job, managing their money, and finding somewhere to live.

CREATE didn't find any differences in how confident young people were across states and territories, but there were differences based on the kind of home they lived in (whether it was foster, kinship, residential or living independently). Young people who were already living independently felt more confident overall compared to those in residential and permanent care.

**How I will financially support myself without a job, transport, youth worker/foster carer support. How will I save for a car if I can't get a job? Feeling unstable without Child Safety as I don't necessarily have a parent to rely on. Child Safety is a safety net if I need advice. (Female, 17)**

Carers and caseworkers need to make sure to spend time with young people so they feel confident about transitioning and have all the information they need. What is really positive is that almost all young people had talked to someone about transitioning – most often it was their carer, followed by caseworkers and friends.

## MANY YOUNG PEOPLE IN RESIDENTIAL CARE FEEL THEIR NEEDS ARE NOT BEING MET

When CREATE looked at whether there were differences in what young people said in the survey based on what kind of home they lived in, we were really concerned about some things young people in residential care told us.

For example, while about 96% of young people felt safe and secure in foster, kinship and permanent care, only 69% of young people in residential care felt safe and secure.

**I do think they should get the people out of group homes and get carers for them. Because I think everyone should feel like they have their own home rather than being in with strangers. And it's really horrible there with the walls and alarms. Everyone should feel safe. (Female, 15)**

**The residential units need improving with less variation in**

**kids' ages, because younger kids can get exposed to bad things. (Male, 18)**

Young people in residential care also had the least placement stability- about a quarter of young people in residential care had lived in 10 or more placements.

**I don't like living in a resi at all - all my brothers and sisters live in a foster care placement and I don't like it. It's getting hard for me because I'm getting moved around a lot. (Female, 16)**

Young people in residential care were more likely to tell us they felt they were treated differently to the other young people in their home. They also were less likely to feel like they had a say and were listened to, and less likely to see their friends outside of school hours.

These may be some reasons why young people in residential care were also less happy in their placements compared to other types. However, young people in residential care were also less likely to say they could talk to their caseworker when they wanted to, and rated their caseworkers as less helpful than young people in foster and kinship care.

## What was different?

There were some parts of the National Standards where CREATE's findings differed from what the Government found when they wrote their report in 2015. These related to how many young people reported having a Case Plan, Cultural Support Plan, and Leaving Care Plan.

### CASE PLANNING

Standard 4 of the National Standards says that every young person should have a plan that is personal to them and outlines their health, education and other needs. These case plans definitely should include the views of the young person!

In 2015 the Government reported that 82% of children and young people in care had a case plan. However, in 2018 CREATE found that only 44% of young reported having a case plan, and of these only 57% said they had actually helped make it.

**32%**

CREATE 2013

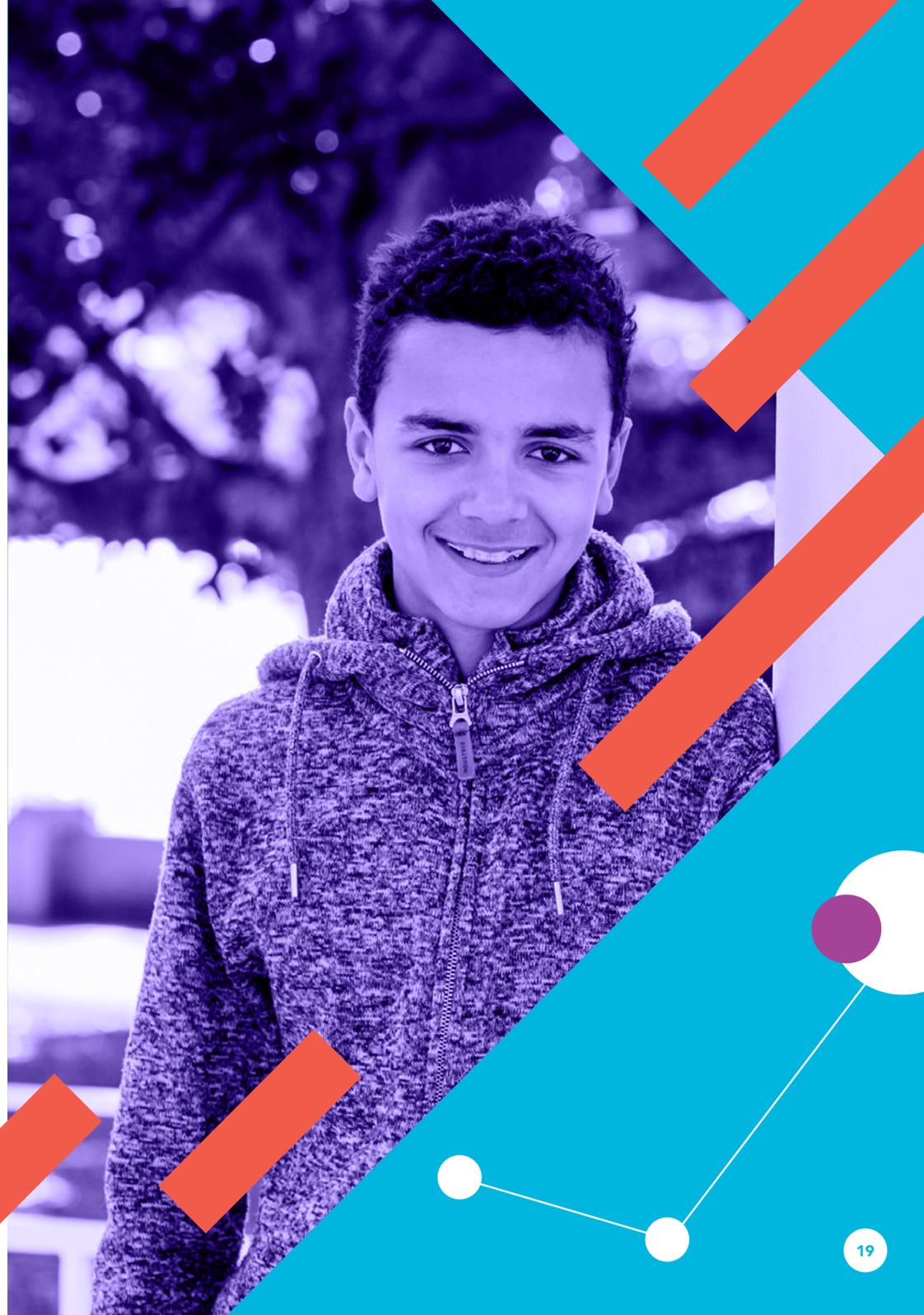
**82%**

Government Report 2015

**44%**

CREATE 2018

Proportion of young people who say they have a current case plan



## Do young people think case plans are useful?

Young people were asked whether they thought their case plans were useful. On a scale of 0 (not useful) to 100 (very useful), young people rated case plans 68. So young people think case plans are useful, but there's room for improvement.

**They just never really used my words. My case plan was pretty much just what they thought was best for me. (Female, 17)**

**If I knew what it was, how it affects me or how I can see it and help do it. (Female, 10)**

Young people felt case plans would be more useful if they had been more involved in making these plans and they knew what they were for.

## LEAVING CARE PLAN

Standard 13 states that young people should have a leaving care plan that they start developing with their caseworker when they turn 15. This plan should detail the support that they can get after they turn 18, like what kind of financial help they can access.

While the Government records state that about 60% of young people aged 15-18 have a leaving care plan, only 24% of the young people in CREATE's survey knew that such a plan had been made. None of the 15-18 year olds in ACT had said they had a leaving

care plan, but 40% of young people in WA did.

**I emailed her and the team leader multiple times about my leaving care plan. I have not gotten any response yet, my caseworker told me my case isn't a priority. I am turning 18 this year in 9 months and I strongly feel like nothing is happening. (Female, 17)**

Young people who said they had been involved in making the plan were more likely to say it was useful. Having more information about help available after care and information about how to get personal case files would have made the plans more useful.

Proportion of young people aged 15 and over who have a leaving care plan

**33% CREATE 2013**

**60% Government Report 2015**

**24% CREATE 2018**

## CULTURAL SUPPORT PLAN

Cultural Support Plans are used to ensure a young person who is Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander remains connected to their culture and community. The plans include information such as language, traditions and customs.

While the Government reported in 2015 that over 81% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children had a current Cultural Support Plan, CREATE in 2018 found that

only 18% of young people were aware of such a plan!

**I want to find out if I have a cultural support plan so I can get help finding more info about my culture and where my family was from. (Female, 14)**

Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have a cultural support care plan

**10% CREATE 2013**

**81% Government Report 2015**

**18% CREATE 2018**

## How connected to culture do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people feel?

About a third (31%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who participated in the survey said they felt 'quite' or 'very' connected to their culture. On the other hand, 30% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people said they had little connection to their culture – this needs to improve!

Young people said they learnt the most about their culture from carers, except in NT and WA where they learnt more from birth parents and family members. Young people in TAS were more likely to not talk to anyone about their culture.

**I'd like to talk more with my caseworker. I'd love to learn everything about my culture. (Male, 14 years)**

**I want to know more about my Aboriginal culture. I want to know if my dad's dad has any Aboriginal blood in him, because I know about my mum's side. And I want to know where they came from, which mob he came from. (Female, 14)**

## WHY ARE THERE DIFFERENCES?

Why might CREATE find different results to the Government Report?

The Government report was based on what plans were in the Departments records and young people's case files. So what this shows is that caseworkers may write up a plan for the young person, and store it on the computer system but young people aren't aware that this record exists. A young person may not know about having a case plan if a caseworker has never explained what it is!

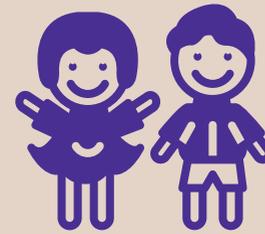
**CREATE is worried that this may mean that young people are not having the chance to properly participate in important decision making processes. If they don't know what a case plan is, and what kind of things are included in it, they may not know what kind of things they can talk to their caseworker about in order to have their say.**

## Some other findings!



**31%**

of respondents were moved from placements they did not want to leave



**55%**

of children and young people said they knew quite a lot about why they were in care

**OVER 90%**

of children and young people were able to name a person they felt they could rely on to support them in the future

**68%**

of children and young people had been to a counselling service

**93%**

of kids said they had regular health checks and saw a doctor at least once a year

**73%**



of kids feel like they are treated very similar or exactly the same as other kids in their house

To relax most kids said they play sport or spent time outdoors but a lot said they spent time playing on the computer or on their phone



**ONLY 32%**

of young people knew their state or territory had a Charter of Rights for Young People in Out-of-Home Care

You can read more about these in the main report found at [create.org.au](http://create.org.au)!

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