

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

The logo for CREATE Foundation, featuring the word "create" in a stylized, rounded font with "FOUNDATION" in a smaller, sans-serif font below it. The logo is set against a purple circular background with overlapping blue and pink circles.

creating a better life
for children and young
people in care

INDEPENDENT SURVEY REVEALS TAS YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE FEEL SAFE AND SECURE, BUT NEED MORE SAY IN CARE PLANS

Hobart, 3rd April, 2019, today CREATE Foundation will hold a state briefing on findings from the largest independent survey of Tasmanian 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. In spite of this, the Tasmanian figure is better than the national response.

Key findings indicate that only 45% of respondents knew about a case plan (which is higher than the national figure of 43.6%) and of that, 65% were involved in making the plan for their life. Young people in TAS have more stability with their caseworkers (the highest proportion with only 1-2 caseworkers) and yet, when it came to attending formal meetings, they did so 45% of the time. Nationally, 92.7% of respondents agreed with the statement that they “felt safe and secure” in their placement and the result was higher in TAS, 96% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement. Respondents said that they were not confident they knew how to complain if they had concerns about their treatment, with only 66% knowing how to complain.

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***¹ 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 1,275 children and young people between 10-17 years old, 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).

18-year-old Hobart woman, Nicola, shared her response to the survey findings: *“I am honestly shocked knowing that in 2019, 45% of children and young people in care in Tasmania still do not know what a case plan is. I think we still need to bring more support for caseworkers, who are overloaded, and they can then sit and talk to us about what a plan is.”*

“What I feel very strongly about is the need for individual education plans. A plan like this can change a young person’s life and give them a chance for having a better future,” said Nicola, who is currently enrolled at University.

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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.**

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

- 45% of TAS respondents reported being aware of having a case plan, with 65% of the children and young people actually involved in its preparation.
- Care placements are most stable in TAS when time in care is taken into account.
- Less TAS young people experienced an unwanted move from a placement, 21.7% versus 31% nationally.
- 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.
- 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).
- Only 5% of TAS respondents had a cultural support plan.

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, results clearly illustrated 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 that 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%).

CREATE's state briefing event is taking place at Parliament Square, Hobart, 3.30pm, Wednesday 3rd April, 2019. Presenters include Executive Director of Research and survey 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. This is a non-media event. Interviews can be arranged prior to the event.

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 or 1800 655 105

Media Enquiries: To discuss a story idea regarding the new survey findings, arrange an interview with CREATE Chief Executive, Ms Jacqui Reed, survey author, Dr Joseph McDowall or a young person with a care experience contact Leigh White via 0431 932 122 or hello@leighwhite.com.au ; or Andrea Doney via 0402 050 418 or andrea@admarcoms.com.au

View CREATE's standard and young person's reports via this link:

<https://create.org.au/publications/2018-create-report/>

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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