

MEDIA RELEASE

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INDEPENDENT SURVEY REVEALS NT YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE NEED MORE SAY IN THEIR CARE PLANS & CASEWORKER CONTACT

Darwin, 29th April, 2019, today CREATE Foundation will hold a state briefing on findings from the largest independent survey of Northern Territorian children and young people with an out-of-home care experience. The results indicate that 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.

Key findings indicate 23% of respondents knew about their case plan (lower than the national figure of 43.6%) and of those, just over half were involved in making the plan for their life. Nationally, 92.7% agreed with the statement that they “felt safe and secure” in their placement, 66% of NT respondents strongly agreed with the statement. Young people in NT said they were least likely to see their caseworker when they needed to (only 46% which is the lowest nationally) and 38.2% had been moved from a placement they didn’t want to leave. When it came to leaving care, only 20% of 15-18-year-olds knew about their leaving care plan, with only 11% aware of their Cultural Support Plan.

A young Aboriginal NT woman who is engaged with CREATE (i.e. known as a Young Consultant) stated that the survey findings on lack of planning was “...a negative part in the report. I will be turning 18 very shortly and have requested several times for a leaving care plan and I am still waiting for one and no-one has spoken to me about it - only my carer has. I am very disappointed that it has not gone to the stage where I expected it would be,” stated the young woman (name withheld).

“Reports like this really matter to me because it shows how much young people in the care system really feel and think. Moving about can be terrible and I know how important it is to live with a family who is there for you 24/7, to care about you and having to be loved again,” she continued.

“I think it’s sad that not all young people have this experience and would like everyone in care to have the best and know they are special and that they are loved and cared for, even if they are struggling and don’t have a family.”

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 for giving a voice to children and young people about their direct experience and needs.

The highly anticipated report, titled: ***Out-of-Home Care in Australia: Children and Young People’s Views After 5 Years of National Standards¹*** 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).

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 for NT shown below:

- 34% children and young people did not live with their siblings also in care, (split sibling placements), the second highest number across Australia. More young people wanted contact with all of their family members compared to other states.
- Young people had the least amount of knowledge of why they were placed in care (62% on a scale of 0 “not at all”, 100 “all I need”).
- 36% of young people were very likely to talk about their concerns with someone, and were more likely to talk to a birth parent about these concerns, compared to those in other states/ territories. Birth parents were considered to be more concerned for the young person compared to birth parents in other states and territories.
- 35% did not have internet access for personal use (highest across all jurisdictions).
- Disappointingly, young people had the least say in decisions about placements compared to other states (they ‘rarely’ had a say); and felt least heard when they expressed their views.
- 65% of children and young people said they experienced difficulty in connecting with friends outside of school.
- 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.

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 the results overall clearly illustrated the importance of meaningfully including children and young people in care and cultural support planning, through to transition planning for their entry to adulthood.

“The new survey found that most children and young people have little awareness of planning processes or plans about them, even when workers maintain that plans exist”, commented Ms Reed.

“Child friendly processes reflect a respect for the basic rights of a child or young person to know about and inform decisions impacting them and their care journey. To develop plans in isolation discounts young people and in turn their links to information, supportive adults and cultural connections that could all be part of ongoing supports. It is vital to see the system establish robust training and tools for workers to strengthen connection – potentially also strengthening placement stability for young people”.

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%).

Event Information: CREATE's state briefing event is a non-media event taking place 10.30-12pm, Monday, 29th April, 2019, in both Darwin and simultaneously in Alice Springs. NT Minister for Children, Ms Dale Wakefield MLA will deliver a live video address from Alice Springs, shared with Darwin. Dignitaries include Executive Director of Research and survey author, **Dr Joseph McDowall**; Children's Commissioner, Colleen Gwynne; Chief Executive of Foster and Kinship Carers Assoc., Ann Owen; and Chief Executive of Anglicare, Dave Pugh, along with sector representatives. Presentations include Dr McDowall's findings on the survey results, 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.

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 an NT 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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