

MEDIA RELEASE

15 October, 2020.

creating a better life
for children and young
people in care

Pandemic Pressure Passes Tipping Point For Young People With A Care Experience

Early trauma and disadvantage are factors putting children and young people with an out-of-home care experience at greater risk of mental health challenges due to the impact on daily life of the global pandemic. The influencing factors include loss of routine, self-quarantine or other social isolation, lack of opportunities for social connection, changes to ways of accessing mental health support, distressing news coverage and uncertainty, and the risk of homelessness and joblessness.

Each October, **Mental Health Month** is an opportunity to raise awareness of mental health and wellbeing, for yourself and your community. The 2020 theme is “Tune In” which means being present, such as listening to the person speaking during conversations and being opening to hearing what they are experiencing, even if it is very different to your experience on the current situation.

Over 44,906¹ Australian children and young people currently live 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.

CREATE’s research has found young people with a care experience have been affected by isolation and that changes to services, like Telehealth (being the only avenue for accessing most mental health support) did not work as well as the previous face-to-face consultations. CREATE found that young people also spoke of concerns about the pressure on support services and that they were unable to access help.

Their worries around fear for the future and housing or job stability, or being disconnected from loved ones, or support networks led to feeling they didn’t want to talk to their mental health support worker or psychologist about longer term issues they had worked on, due to being overwhelmed by the current situation.

24-year-old, Tay from Victoria had two casual jobs and stable accommodation before COVID-19. Tay shared that she lost both her jobs due to the isolation restrictions and was also asked to move out of her accommodation, in case she was a health risk. She became jobless and homeless quickly with very few options and placing her at risk.

South Australian, Sonja, 24, said she struggled with social isolation and that *“This whole pandemic has messed with my mental health, I would call my mum, like four times a day.”*

Brisbane young man, TJ, has a care experience and identifies as Aboriginal, shared how the global pandemic has affected his mental wellbeing: *“Prior it was like, okay. But the fact that I knew I wasn't able to go “here or there” to places, or meet up with friends and de-stress doing my hobby, it just made things twice as bad.”*

Aboriginal young woman, Tricia, from South Australia, said the self-quarantine restrictions were impacting her mental wellbeing: *“But also, being on top of my family every single day. They just*

were getting what's the word... on my nerves. It's good company, but not good company at the same time. But during the COVID19, I have focussed on my mental health. I figured out ways I could get out of the house and stuff like that within the rules of the state."

Many young people with a care experience already carry the impact of early trauma. This can lead to more complex symptoms and CREATE says access to mental health supports is needed urgently and at a greater level than for other young people.

"A combination of the bushfires and global pandemic have created unprecedented worry and risk for all. A higher level of support is appropriate and should be ongoing for young people with a care experience even outside of a global pandemic, due to additional early trauma they have experienced," said Ms Jacqui Reed, Chief Executive Officer, CREATE Foundation.

"We were pleased to hear in the 2020 Federal Budget announcement of an increase of double the support in the Mental Health Care Plan program to 20 sessions. This has the potential to make mental health support a little more affordable for those who need it most."

During 2020, the CREATE Foundation team worked tirelessly to ensure it was easy to access official guidelines early in the pandemic. CREATE also directed a lot of energy and focus into creating appropriate activities to support those in care, enable feeling connected and fulfilled during the isolation period. More can be read on CREATE's website about blogs, webinar interviews with young people in care and post-care. Read more at: www.create.org.au

Read about Mental Health Month here <http://mentalhealthmonth.wayahead.org.au/tune-in/>

Resources for managing daily life during COVID-19 pandemic:
<https://coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au/managing-my-daily-life.html>

For further comment from CREATE's Chief Executive, Ms Jacqui Reed, and/or a young person with care experience contact Leigh White, CREATE Communications Advisor, via (m) 0431 932 122 or leigh.white@create.org.au

Key statistics on the care sector in Australia:

1. 44,906 children were in out-of-home care across Australia at 30 June 2019*
2. Young people in out-of-home care are 16 times more likely to be under a youth justice order than the general population
3. 35% of young people experience homelessness within the first year of leaving care
4. 46% of males have been involved with the justice system since leaving care
5. 29% of young people who have left care or preparing to leave care are unemployed
6. 36% children and young people in care do not live with any of their siblings
7. 35% of young people in care have five or more caseworkers during their time in care
8. 67% of young people in care over the age of 15 are not aware of having a leaving care plan

McDowall, J. J. (2015). Sibling placement and contact in out-of-home care. Sydney: CREATE Foundation

Other references:

* Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2020). Child protection Australia 2018-2019. Child Welfare series no. 72. Cat. no. CWS 74. AIHW. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/3a25c195-e30a4f10-a052-adbfd56d6d45/aihw-cws-74.pdf.aspx?inline=true>

** *"From 9 October 2020 until 30 June 2022, 10 additional individual psychological therapy sessions, previously available only to people whose movement was restricted by a state or territory public health order, are now available each calendar year to all eligible patients under the existing Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the MBS (Better Access) initiative."*

<http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/Factsheet-10MentalHealthSessions>

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