

Participating in Decision-making in Western Australia

Young people have the right to be engaged meaningfully as decision-makers in their own lives. Active participation can improve confidence, wellbeing, and independence.

For young people in out-of-home care, participation can be complex. It is important for carers and caseworkers to create safe spaces for young people to have a say.

CREATE asked 26 young people aged 12-18 years with a care experience in Western Australia about their views on participating in key decisions impacting their lives in out-of-home care.

77%
felt their right to participate was well respected

62%
said their requests were followed up reasonably often

24%
had little to no involvement in developing their care plan

62%
reported facing a particular barrier to speaking up

“

I guess because you're the one in care and everything is happening to you so it's really important that they listen to you. You're still growing up and your choices should be heard. (Female, 17)

I don't know. I get a lot of new people so it's just really hard. If my caseworker didn't change it would be easier. (Female, 16)

If I was able to do it [have a say] by writing it. I find it easier to write things down like if I was emailing my caseworker. That's never been an option. (Male, 15)

”

Key Messages

Young people highly valued being involved in making decisions across a range of key life areas (e.g., living situation, health, connection to culture, family contact and education). They were most comfortable in having a say when they had time to think and respond; felt listened to; could trust their caseworker; and felt safe.

“ I sometimes feel like I don't get to have my say. I can speak to my partner but I can't get hold of my case manager and even if I do, they often don't listen. I think having your say is when the words that you say are actually taken into consideration and actions and steps are taken towards that. (Female, 18)

Barriers to having a say included:

- limited contact with caseworkers;
- not feeling heard;
- lack of supportive/trusting relationships; and
- feeling too anxious/ shy to voice their concerns.

“ [It would help] To say one question and give me time to actually respond and not just keep going over the top of you. (Non-Binary, 17).

Key changes that would help the young people in this consultation to speak up include:

- increased support (from caseworkers and carers);
- more invitations to speak up;
- improved access to information (e.g., Charter of Rights); and
- being given greater choice.

Actions

Support caseworkers to be motivated and equipped to provide quality support to young people.

- Increase contact to develop trusted relationships; and
- tailor communication options to foster a sense of safety (e.g., written/phone call/face-to-face).

Increase opportunities for participation through regularly inviting collaboration from young people on their care plans and providing informal, culturally safe opportunities to chat outside of meetings.

Ensure young people feel adequately consulted during care plan meetings by directly checking-in and slowing the pace down.

Inform all young people of their rights around participation.

Contact CREATE to get a copy of the full report.
create@create.org.au

create
FOUNDATION

create.org.au