

# OK, SO A NEST IS A HOME



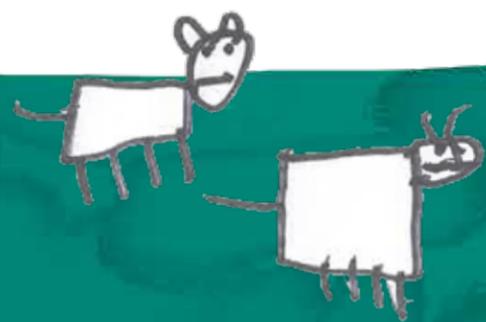
Views and experiences  
of Tasmanian children  
and young people in  
out-of-home care



Can you find me hiding on the pages of this book?



We acknowledge and pay our respects to the palawa people of lutruwita as the original and ongoing custodians of this land and for the more than 40,000 years they have cared for their country and their children.



OK, SO  
A NEST  
IS A HOME



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# INTRODUCTION



Hello, my name is Leanne McLean.

I am the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Tasmania. My job is to speak up for all Tasmanian children and young people under 18 years of age to help make sure Tasmania is a better place for them.

An important part of my job is looking out for children and young people who are in out-of-home care, often referred to as being 'in care'. When I talk with children and young people who are in care, I ask them their views on how well the out-of-home care system is working for them and what could be improved. In the last year, in exploring the topic of 'Being Loved and Safe' my conversations with children and young people have focussed especially on what it means to have safety and stability while living in care.

I offered children and young people choices in the way they would like to speak with me. Some chose a one-on-one chat and others preferred to talk in a group. Simon Spain and Victoria Ryle from All That We Are, also assisted by guiding young people in making, drawing, writing or talking about nests as another way of talking about 'home'. Some children and young people created and published a small book of their own, to share with important people in their lives.

I felt that the messages and artwork shared with me also lent themselves to being collated and presented together in a book format. In this book, you will see some of the thoughts, ideas and beautiful artwork created by children and young people during these important discussions.

Exploring what safety and stability means to children and young people in care has been unforgettable for me. I have laughed, cried, and learned so much from those I spoke with. It is vital we listen to their voices and act on their ideas if we want to truly improve Tasmania's out-of-home care system.

Finally, a warm thank you to every child and young person who has been involved in this work, who has shared their experiences and the experiences of others in care. You have great ideas and I have learned so much from you. I will continue to work with others to ensure that we improve the out-of-home care system in Tasmania.

Leanne McLean  
Tasmanian Commissioner for Children & Young People  
May 2022



## DID YOU KNOW?

**Out-of-home care is overnight care for children under 18 who can't live with their families due to child safety concerns.**

**Each night, about 1,100 Tasmanian children and young people are in care. That is about 1 in every 100 (1%) children and young people in communities across the state.**

# I. A NEST IS WHERE YOU FEEL AT HOME



My carer gave me the choice of what to call her, so I could have called her Aunt or Mum, which I did [call her Mum].

15 year old

My Child Safety Officer always made sure that she updated our interests on the care plan, and if we didn't like something anymore, she'd take it off.

15 year old

I'm lactose intolerant; it took me almost 20, 22 months to convince them to actually start buying my milk, right? Simple things like that right? It's not expensive. I can't have normal milk because I'm lactose intolerant. And I grew up on goat's milk.

17 year old

If there's activities they [the carers] know we're going to participate in, [like a sport], then yeh, they'll do that [pay for it]. And then during school holidays we have an activity budget, we can do different activities and stuff.

17 year old

here are some pictures of stuff I dont want in my nest.

nom nom  
people who eat loud  
olives

and here are stuff I do want

W-Rid E food  
mum more food

## DID YOU KNOW?

On 30 June 2020, almost two thirds (63.9%) of all Tasmanian children in care were aged 5-14 years.

a nest is where you feel at home!



MUSIC, Books, sketch  
Books!!  
Things I love I

So the wi-fi, it does work. However, the time is from 3:30pm-9:30pm.

17 year old

I feel like on the weekends it could be on for longer. And it's slow. It took me three days to download one game that's not even that big.

13 year old

(Two young people in same residential care home)

## 2. BULLET PROOF WALLS



Your own room is like, good for your own privacy... Sometimes you just want your own space... if you just need to calm down. You've got your own little space to get your head back into gear and stuff which is good.

15 year old

So, we have this exit here, and we have the one at the end of the hallway. However, they're both always deadlocked with a key.

17 year old



My nest keeps me safe. It protects me from kidnappers.

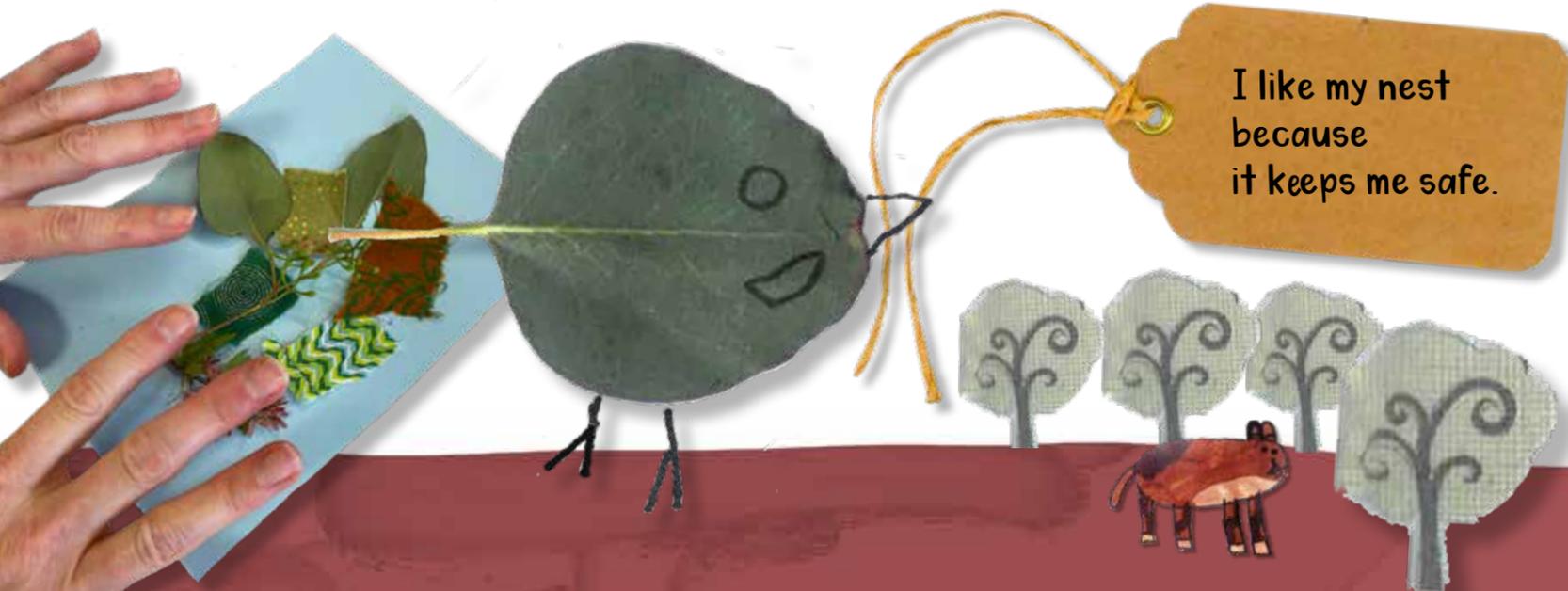


What's in the ideal nest?  
 Eggs  
 Mats for TikTok dances  
 Kitchen  
 Full PC gaming etc.  
 Bullet proof walls and roof that look like a stick  
 Security guards  
 Pokémon collection  
 Just me and my dog in my nest  
 Oh and my Mum... and my teddy... and the fridge  
 And sticks.



The warm mummy will keep the babies safe!

### 3. EVERYONE NEEDS TO FEEL SAFE



I like my nest because it keeps me safe.

Everyone needs to feel safe, even if you're not in care... But especially with people in care, they need to feel like they're safe.

15 year old

You gotta have carers that aren't abusive and have carers who are good people.

20 year old care leaver

Mainly they'll be like 'what do you think of them?' and I'll be like, 'that one's pretty good, they can work here'.

13 year old

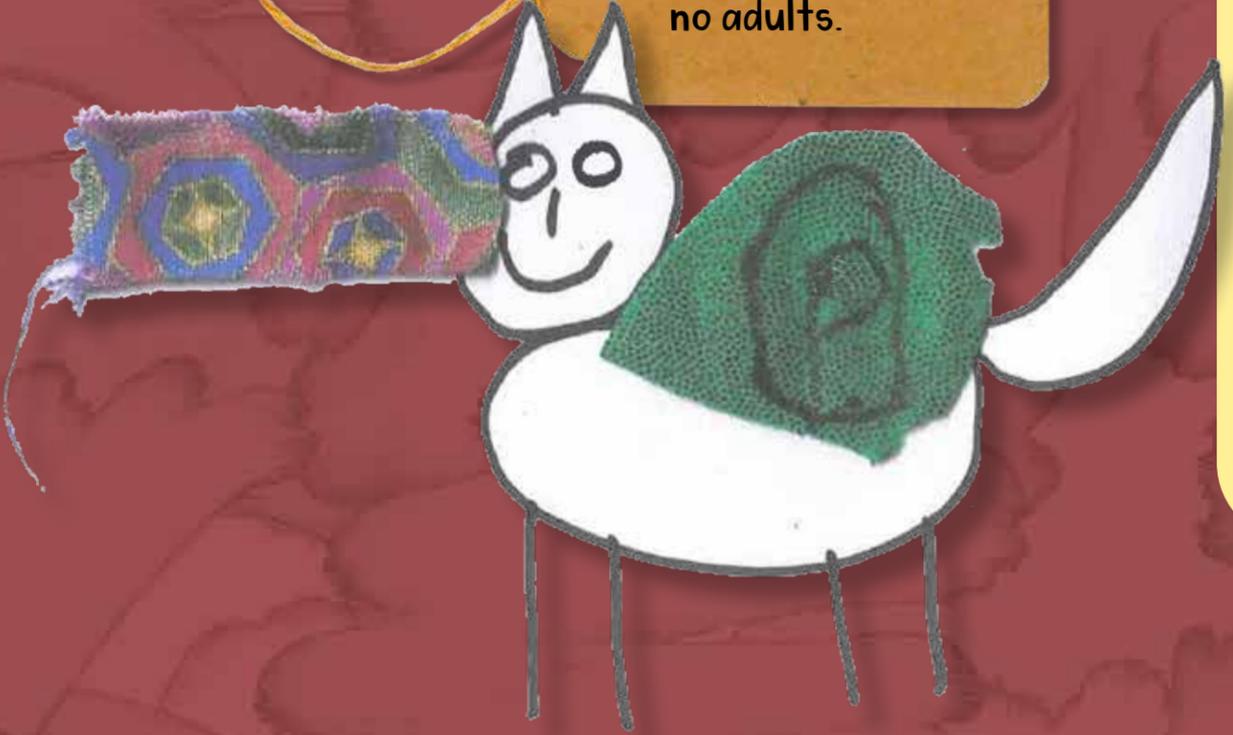
We have main carers that come in, and then some that come in and out and take shifts sometimes. ... And then occasionally we'll have some extras, for example buddies (on buddy shifts).

17 year old

what a nest means to me is Family, Bed, blanket, Food, a roof



I only want birds in my nest... no adults.



Some young people with a care experience have ideas about ways to check if potential carers might be suitable for the role:

Maybe check what they [carers] do for a living. The stress of their job could also contribute to their moods so also check in with them about that.

15 year old

Having more foster kids or even people who were in the foster care system talk one on one with these new people who are trying to become carers.

16 year old

See if people who have experienced care firsthand would trust these people.

16 year old

See how they [potential carers] deal with little outbursts or panic attacks, or how well they deal with situations.

16 year old

# 4. SOMEBODY IN YOUR CORNER



For me, I just think having anyone you can talk to. It could be that you're not even talking to them but just knowing that somebody is there. For me it's my carer cos I can trust my carer. I can trust my sister or my foster sister, so I do have people...  
16 year old



**DID YOU KNOW...**  
There are different types of out-of-home care placements for children and young people in Tasmania.  
Around 5 in 10 children in care live in foster care. This is when the child or young person lives in a home with carer/s who are not related to them. Around 4 in 10 children live in relative/kinship care. This is when the child or young person lives with a relative, close family friend or community member who provides care for them. Fewer than 1 in 10 children live in residential care. This is a type of care placement in a residential building where paid staff provide care.



It was just more of...I'm going to talk to my case worker and see if anything can be done and if not, well then I might run away then. That was my mindset.  
15 year old

We haven't been told the exact ways to make a complaint but we can just ask. They're not going to hide it from us or anything.  
17 year old

I've had caseworkers and carers who either blatantly haven't believed me or have made it a lot worse. Those placements have never felt safe because what if that happens again?  
17 year old

Knowing that they're gonna actually try to do something about it to stop [the problem], feeling like you have somebody in your corner.  
17 year old

## 5. KNOWING PEOPLE UNDERSTAND WHAT'S HAPPENING IN YOUR HEAD

Child Safety Officers possibly doing really regular check-ups, just looking around the house and finding potential dangers and hazards, like checking up on the child themselves.

15 year old

A lot of young people in care have had very traumatic things happen to them. So one of the big things... is knowing that people understand what's happening in your head. So if I get triggered and I get overloaded sometimes [with] too many sounds, too many things going at once, I have to actually stop everything that I'm doing and just calm my head down a bit. Knowing that the people around me like my carer and my case worker understand that, and they're actively trying to help me with that, makes me feel really safe.

17 year old

Chatting with other people in out-of-home care, there's been cases where [young people] have tried to get kicked out of as many placements as possible because they want to go back home to their mum and dad.

21 year old care leaver

Regularly just asking if they feel stable, like not just the home that's feeling stable but also their mental state. The house may feel stable to them, but if so much has happened, even though it might have been feeling like a forever ago, it can still take a toll on their mental health and how they feel.

15 year old



If I ever wanna chat, it's like 'wait up, I've got to do this paperwork first'.

17 year old

It [this residential care home] feels like a hospital because they do shifts like nurses do; the difference is that night shift gets to sleep at 11 o'clock. And once it's 11 o'clock, nobody is their responsibility.

17 year old

# 6. I FIND MY WAY BACK WITH LOVE



I think when kids come into foster care, people think, 'oh yeah, this kid is just wanting to be loved', kind of like a Stuart Little kind of thing. And they don't understand that they're probably going to be really argumentative or scared or quiet or loud.

21 year old care leaver

I trust one of the youth workers with all my heart. She's the sweetest person, she's even argued with cops for me, she's taken me to hospital in the middle of the night.

17 year old

I feel like, as for the system changing, I feel like it is changing. I feel like we're slowly getting there with more empathy, more communication, more support, rather than just viewing the kids as a case file.

21 year old care leaver



**DID YOU KNOW...**  
 On 30 June 2020, 38.2% of children in out-of-home care had been in care for 5 years or more; and 30.5% of children in out-of-home care had been in care for between 2 and 5 years.



## 7. SOMEONE WHO IS THERE FOR YOU



If everything else fell through...[my Child Safety Officer] is the one person I can really rely on cos she's been in my life for almost 10 years now.

15 year old

Care is when someone takes care of you.  
Kind is when someone is nice and Pilate.



### DID YOU KNOW?

Approximately 19% of Tasmanian children and young people in out-of-home care have a diagnosed disability.

A lot of kids in care, they don't have an adult they know they can talk to about anything which is kind of sad really 'cos that's how a lot of kids in care fall into the trap of depression and stuff 'cos they don't have anywhere else to go.

15 year old

Having a supportive adult to be able to talk to [is important]. So, being able to share if you're upset, in trouble or whatever... It doesn't really matter who they are, just as long as they have someone who is there for them.

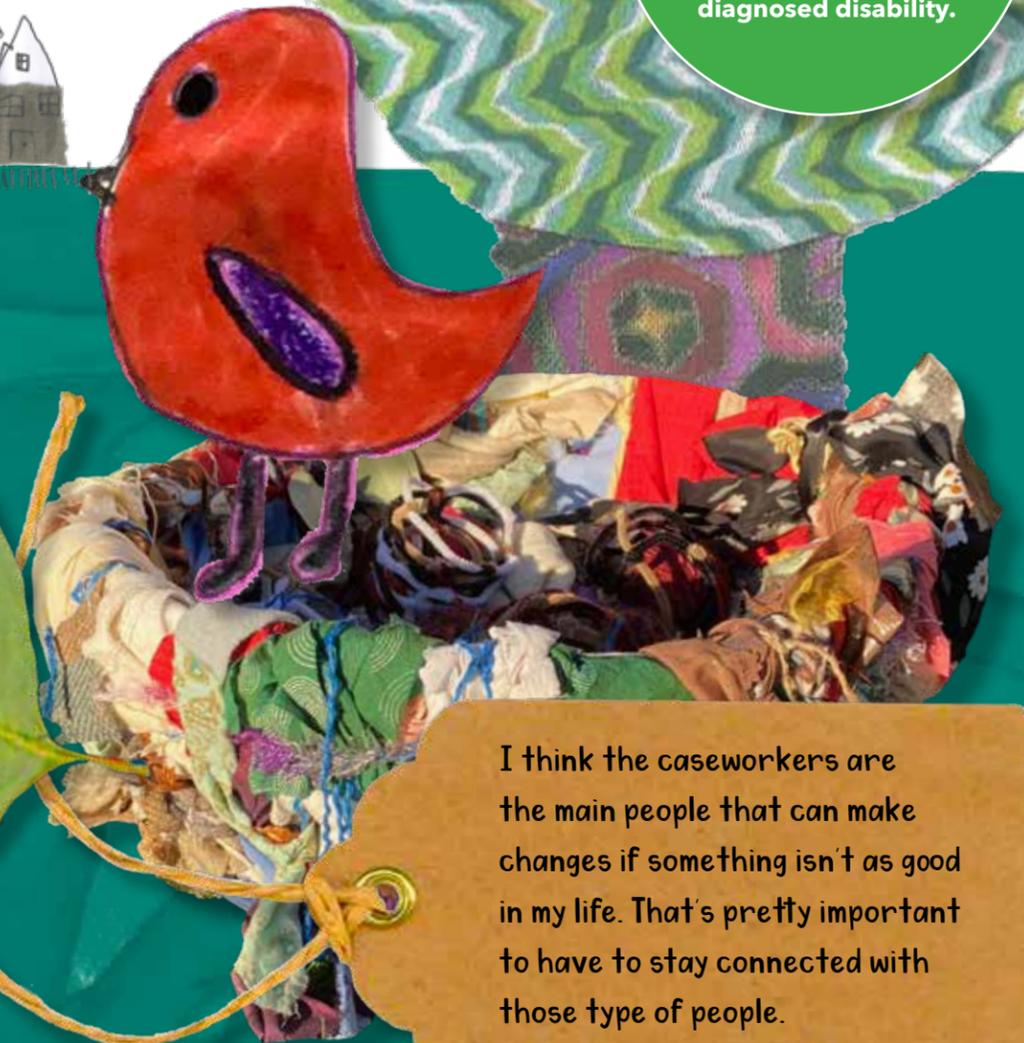
15 year old

I know with my carer she's very caring and likes having the children to have a stable home more than moving around. Definitely a commitment, yeah, having the carer commit to the child.

17 year old

Having that person around, doesn't matter who it is, but is there to help and support you.

14 year old



I think the caseworkers are the main people that can make changes if something isn't as good in my life. That's pretty important to have to stay connected with those type of people.

17 year old

# 8. SPECIAL PEOPLE



*It can get complicated when there are so many people in your nest.*

Some of the things that have contributed to not wanting to move is that they're actual family [kinship carers], so like it's not random people.

15 year old

I heard that [my biological family] wants to see me for Christmas, and I was like, well that's still like, too raw to think about. I don't think I want to do that...

15 year old

That's a really big problem with foster care, they [Child Safety] can force you to have contact [with your biological family] even if they're not good people.

14 year old

Some people in care have to buy presents for family members [in their foster family]; It can be quite stressful because they don't know what they like.

14 year old



*I think it [Christmas] is a great time to catch up with family.*

19 year old, care leaver

*I'd have my family in my nest.*

10 year old

*I've been asking for almost two years. And I'm like 'hey, I kinda wanna learn more about myself'. And they're like, 'you can't be Aboriginal, you're white.'*

17 year old

**DID YOU KNOW...**  
 At 30 June 2020, more than half of Tasmanian Aboriginal children and young people in care were not living with Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal relatives or kin, or other Indigenous caregivers.

# 9. ARE YOU GOING TO KICK ME OUT?



Having a place to call home, it helps stabilise a child. I've been in this foster home for 10 years. Having a stable home is a good thing.

16 year old



It can make the child feel safer and more like they belong if it's stable.

15 year old

Yeah, we all never know [the carers' roster] 'cos they mainly change it all the time.

13 year old

It's important to have a stable home because people in care have enough to worry about as it is, like the stuff they've been through and that. So having a safe and stable home means that's one less thing they have to worry about.

16 year old

I think it's not only saying, 'this is where you're going to be forever', it's about showing that. Give them a key so they can get in if they come home before you or help them decorate their room.

17 year old

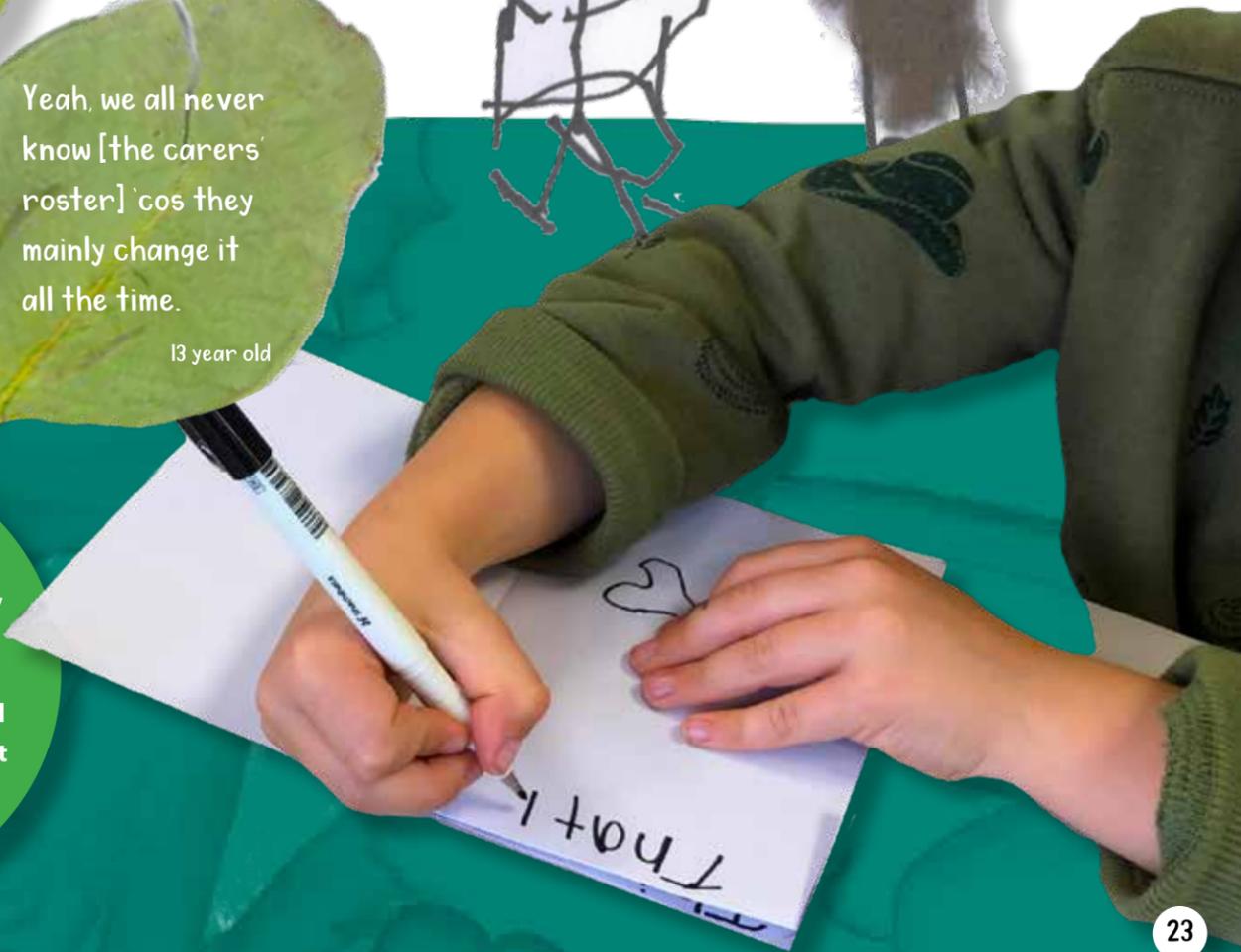
It was always in the back of my mind, whenever I got into a little tiny argument with my carer, I'd immediately be like, 'are you kicking me out?' and she'd be like 'no, but if you continue doing this and acting this way, I will'.

21 year old, care leaver

I've had people tell me, this is going to be your forever home, and this is going to be where you're gonna stay, where you're going to grow up. Then like a month down the track, I'm leaving.

17 year old

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
Nationally, at 30 June 2020, almost 1 in 10 children who'd been in out-of-home care for 2 years or more, had 3 or 4 placements in the past 2 years.



# 10. I'M SCARED ABOUT BEING AN ADULT



Once I was 16, that's all they went on about. 'You need to get Centrelink, you need to do this, you need to do that.' Like dude, no. I fell in like a really bad depression for like, six months. I was barely eating; I was just staying in my bed.

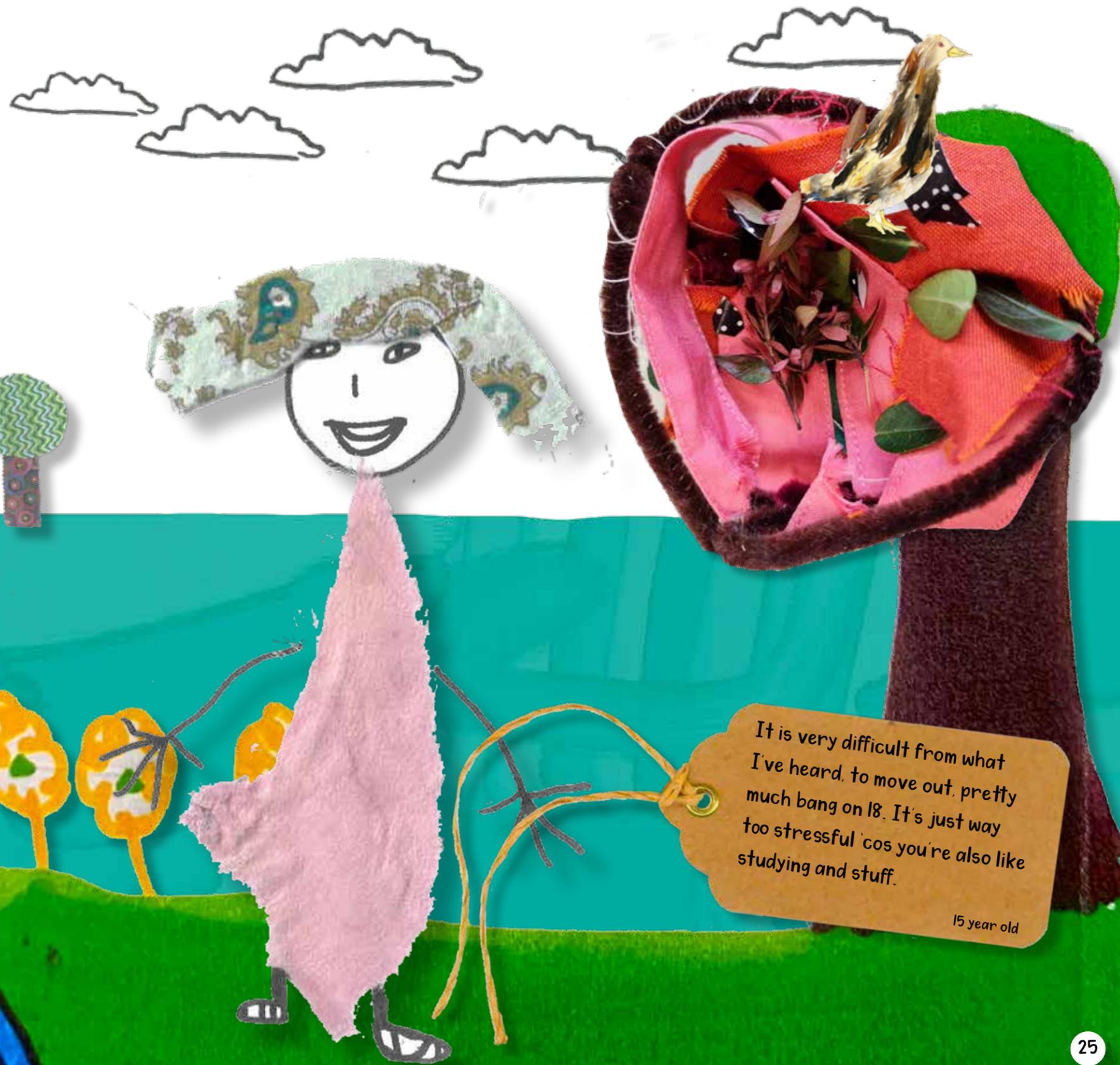
17 year old

We're still young. I still wanna be a teenager. I'll be honest, I'm scared about being an adult. My birthday is quite soon, I'm almost 18, right, and moving into a new house is just terrifying in itself, let alone being independent, and like, you don't know what kind of people live around that area, it's just like, what if my neighbours are harsh? What are the rules? What can I do? What if there's an emergency? But not so much of an emergency you need to call 000. Like say if you... don't know how to cook pasta. Totally not going off my experience here. Like, what do you do?

17 year old

I didn't like the placement I was in, and it just kept getting worse, so I was like, 'okay then, when I turn 16 I'm moving out'. And so I started the discussion with my CSO [Child Safety Officer], and they were looking into places and all that kind of stuff, and they were going to look into training and budgeting and all of that kind of stuff. ... It was definitely more a 'I need to get out of here' kinda thing, rather than 'I think I'm ready'. Yeah.

15 year old



It is very difficult from what I've heard, to move out, pretty much bang on 18. It's just way too stressful 'cos you're also like studying and stuff.

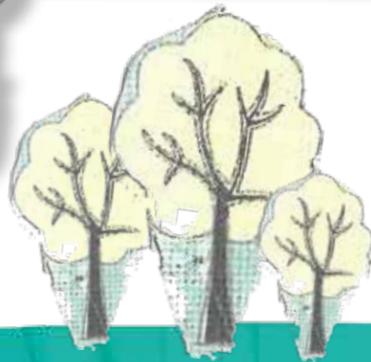
15 year old



I'M SCARED ABOUT BEING AN ADULT...  
continued

I have been homeless six times since I turned 18.

21 year old care leaver



I thought [the Department] was going to help out a lot more too; I have gotten all my furniture second-hand, from my school, by the way – they gave me tables, chairs, a sofa bed, a TV. But the rest of the stuff I've had to go and buy myself. Where do I even pull the money for a fridge? I don't get paid that much.

17 year old

After Care Support is only financial support, it's not supporting you to find a house, it's not supporting you to learn how to budget or anything like that, that is frustrating. I think we can improve that.

21 year old

People who aren't in care just know that 'well, I can just stay here for as long as I need'. Whereas being on an 18-year order, you're like well, I could get shipped out as soon as I turn 18. What am I going to do? Yeah, it's more that mindset.

15 year old



Even just going out and finding your resources, going to Salvos and City Mission, most people don't know about that. Even getting help with a free bus pass, stuff like that can mean so much.

17 year old



# OK, WHAT DOES YOUR NEST LOOK LIKE?

Would you want your nest high or low? and how many people do you want in your nest?

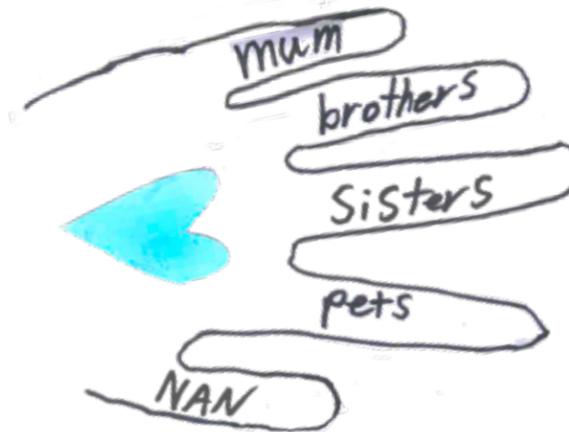
and what don't you want in your nest?

So would your nest be organised or messy?

if you were a Bird living in a nest what bird would you be?

I would be a pluper or a roseana.

# THE OUT-OF-HOME CARE MONITORING PROGRAM



DRAW YOUR NEST HERE

The Commissioner for Children and Young People in Tasmania (the Commissioner) has an Out-of-Home Care Monitoring Program providing independent, external monitoring of out-of-home care in Tasmania.

Monitoring of out-of-home care occurs in four ways:

- Regular data monitoring about out-of-home care.
- Thematic Monitoring. This involves exploring with children and young people in out-of-home care, and other key stakeholders, a theme related to the Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework:
  - Being loved and safe (focus area for 2021-22)
  - Having material basics
  - Being healthy (focus area for 2018-2019)
  - Learning
  - Participating
  - Having a positive sense of culture and identity.
- Investigations. The Commissioner may decide to do an in-depth investigation into a particular issue within the out-of-home care system.
- Monitoring of recommendations. The Commissioner monitors the Tasmanian Government's implementation of the Commissioner's recommendations to strengthen the out-of-home care system.

This book focuses on the thoughts and views of children and young people with an out-of-home care experience. In the second half of 2022, the Commissioner intends to release a formal report focusing on the 'Being loved and safe' theme, aimed at government and sector agencies. The report will conclude the focus on the 'Being loved and safe' theme. It will include data analysis and information from consultations with children and young people in out-of-home care, out-of-home care providers, foster carers and other relevant stakeholders.

For further information and to contact the Commissioner with feedback about the out-of-home care system, visit <https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/>

Please note the Commissioner's out-of-home care monitoring focuses on systemic issues – it is distinct from complaint handling and individual advocacy. The Child Advocate (see contact details on the next page) is able to assist with individual matters.

# THE TEN THEMES

Ten main themes came up as children and young people explained what makes them feel loved and safe in care:



## 1. A NEST IS WHERE YOU FEEL AT HOME

It's important to feel welcome in care placements, and in other places such as schools and communities. Having your individual preferences, needs and strengths noticed and respected is also important.

## 2. BULLET PROOF WALLS

It's important to be physically safe and to be around people who will not hurt you.

## 3. EVERYONE NEEDS TO FEEL SAFE

It's important to know that trusted adults will keep you safe from people who might hurt you.

## 4. SOMEBODY IN YOUR CORNER

It's important to be able to speak up and get the help you need when you have a problem.

## 5. KNOWING PEOPLE UNDERSTAND WHAT'S HAPPENING IN YOUR HEAD

It's important to be around people who understand trauma, and who are supportive, respectful and inclusive.

## 6. I FIND MY WAY BACK WITH LOVE

It's important to feel like you belong in the home you're living in. Pets can also be important companions.

## 7. SOMEONE WHO IS THERE FOR YOU

It is important to have at least one person you can rely on – no matter what. Having somebody who is there for you can impact on how loved and valued you feel.

## 8. SPECIAL PEOPLE

It's important to feel that you are connected to the people, groups and places that matter to you. Sometimes special occasions (e.g. holidays, birthdays) can bring up a range of emotions if you are in care.

## 9. ARE YOU GOING TO KICK ME OUT?

It's important to feel that care placements are stable.

## 10. I'M SCARED ABOUT BEING AN ADULT

It's important to have enough support to leave a care placement. Young people transition out of care when they turn 18 and some may leave earlier if they are able to safely return to their family. All children and young people need to be involved in planning for these big changes. Support during this time is very important.

# WHO CAN I TALK TO?

For children and young people, if you have a problem and need help:

You can talk to an adult you trust.

If you want to talk on the phone, you could call:

- Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800
- 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) - if you're experiencing abuse or violence.

You can chat online with a counsellor at [kidshelpline.com.au](https://kidshelpline.com.au)

If you are, or have been, in out-of-home care in Tasmania:

If you need help to sort out an issue with your placement, you can speak to the Child Advocate, Sonya Pringle-Jones. Phone: 0419 970 181 or 1800 549 725 or Facebook messenger: [child.advocate.tas](https://www.facebook.com/child.advocate.tas)

If you want to get in touch with the Commissioner for Children and Young People and give feedback about your experience of the out-of-home care system, then call: (03) 6166 1366 or email: [childcomm@childcomm.tas.gov.au](mailto:childcomm@childcomm.tas.gov.au)



If you are aged 0-25 and have been or are currently in out-of-home care, the CREATE Foundation can provide support and connect you with others who have also experienced out-of-home care. Website: <https://create.org.au/> or phone: 1800 655 105

For adults, if you have concerns about the safety and wellbeing of a child: Strong Families, Safe Kids Advice and Referral Line 1800 000 123

If you are a foster or kinship carer in Tasmania: Foster and Kinship Carers Association of Tasmania. [www.fkat.org.au](http://www.fkat.org.au) or phone 1800 149 994.

For further information about the Commissioner for Children and Young People's role and major projects: [www.childcomm.tas.gov.au](http://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au). You can also check out the Commissioner's Instagram page: [child\\_comm\\_tas](https://www.instagram.com/child_comm_tas)

## THANK YOU!

This book was made possible with the assistance of the following people and organisations:

- CREATE Foundation
- All That We Are
- Foster and Kinship Carers Association Tasmania (FKAT)
- CatholicCare Tasmania
- Department of Communities Tasmania, including the Child Advocate
- The foster and kinship carers who assisted in transporting children and young people to events.

AND THE BIGGEST THANK YOU OF ALL GOES TO EVERY SINGLE CHILD AND YOUNG PERSON WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THIS BEAUTIFUL BOOK!



A cosy nest is important  
because birds need to  
cosy in and sleep.

6 year old

This book contains the views and artwork of over 50 Tasmanian children and young people, aged 2 - 21 years, with an out-of-home care experience. These views and artwork were shared with the Commissioner and her team at various creative events, including nest making, book making, chats, and consultations held between May 2021 and April 2022. Between them, the children and young people had experienced a range of out-of-home care placement types, including foster care, kinship care and residential care.