

Participation in care

In the Northern Territory

The opportunity for a child or young **people** to voice their **opinion's** or thoughts on decisions affecting their future, has true value. This value lies in enabling participation leading to more responsive policy and improved evidence-based outcomes for individual children and, potentially, their broader communities. Listening to and understanding their voices through participation is fundamental in promoting the human rights of children and young people.

In the NT, CREATE asked 25 care experienced young people, aged 12-18, about their experience with being an active participant in their care and the decision made pertaining to their care. Topics included their awareness of rights, experience of rights being respected, care planning awareness, what the young person felt was important, and whether their wishes were acted on.

80%
were aware of
their participation
rights

32%
Felt they
were not
heard

56%
Reported an
awareness of their
care planning

57%
Had a low to
moderate
involvement in their
care planning

66

"All I do is yell at people sometimes for my rights. They say "I've got so many kids to deal with." They think because I'm older I'm good." (Female, 17)

"The manager always just tells me to make a complaint instead of speaking it out in person. . Making a complaint for myself and writing the problem to other companies instead of speaking it through is hard for me. I just need to sit down with the manager and speak it through to get a proper solution."

(Female, 16)

"There will always be excuses, like the case manager is on leave or something. It's supposed to be updated every year but because the case manager keeps leaving. They always make that an excuse not to do it and it goes for like two years. There should be a backup case manager who will do it." (Female, 16)

"I would make suggestions but sometimes not because of my parents. I feel that when I'm 18, I want to be independent, but my family want me to go to the [community], because they have an organisation. I want to stay here (city) and go to university. I'm not sure if my life would be easy if I moved back there because of the people that would be around me." (Female, 16)

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"I would like to have more of a say when seeing my siblings. I would like to be more involved because I never get to make any choices." (Female, 12)

Key Messages

- A child or young persons' participation in decision-making in the NT OOHC system has intrinsic value.
- Participants portrayed feeling good about themselves and feeling valued when practitioners, and others engaged in their support, not only listened to what they said, but also took prompt action.
- A lack of participation created a real perception that they were being ignored or that their wishes were being disregarded.
- Continued lack of participation has the potential to have damaging consequences for the child or young person's sense of dignity, confidence, and trust in others.

Key areas of change in the participation of care that young people wanted to see included:

- Ensuring young people are truly heard.
- **Young people** wanted more consistencies from multiple people as to how their rights were respected.
- **Young people** wanted access and a sense of connectedness to their family and culture.
- Increased response time for care decisions
- More consistency of access and reliability from the same caseworker.
- Less frequent changing of caseworkers.
- Increased communication/ feedback on requests made with rationales on why some requests cant be met.
- Improved listening from all stakeholders involved in care decisions.

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If I felt comfortable with my caseworker, but I never have. When my last caseworker was leaving, she brought my new caseworker to introduce her. She walked in with her and told me they weren't going to let me go to visit my dad in SA, but the tickets were already bought, and my older sister was going with me as my carer. (Female 16)

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Actions

Increased caseworker preparedness including:

- **a system** for regular review of practice
- established requirements for continuing professional development
- improved caseworker handover processes
 - **a set** of key performance indicators

- Improved communication plans including:
 - a clearly agreed communication contract
 - ample timeframes to make informed decisions
 - cross-checking for mutual understanding

Empowering Children and Young People to

Have a Voice including:

- Ensuring children and young people are aware of their rights to participate .
- Support programs that empower participation.