

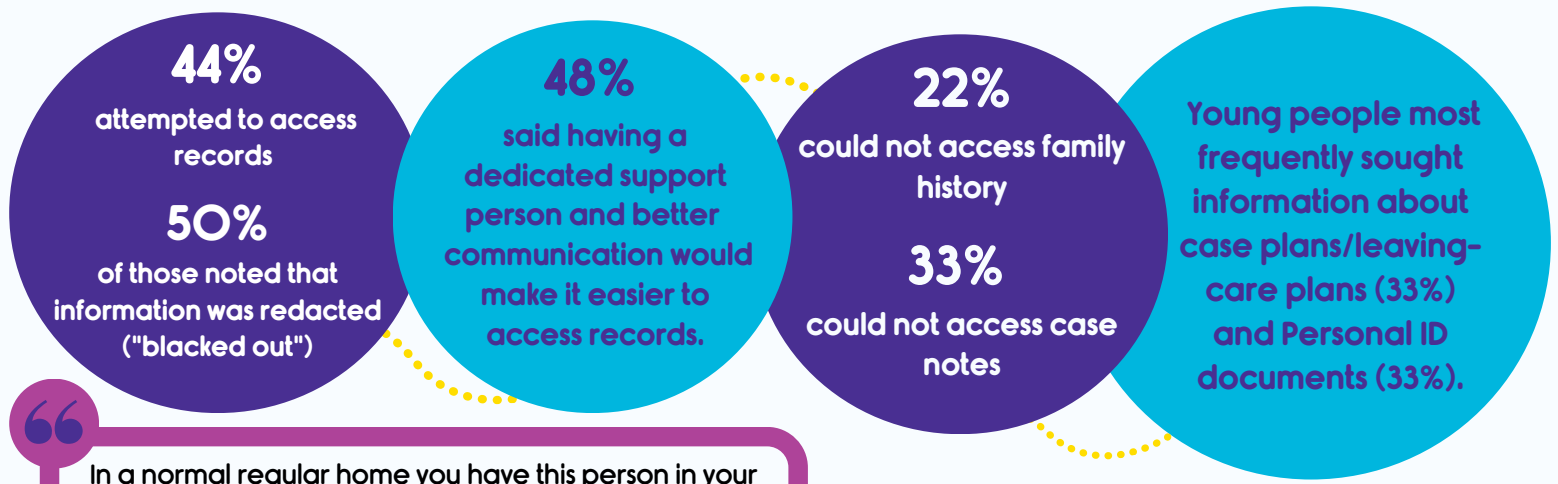


Accessing Records In the Northern Territory

Information that charts the stages of your life; identifies who you are; documents significant events; provides a safekeeping place for family history; and details agreements, plans, and other information about your life story is important. Information may be personal and anecdotal (i.e., photo albums, family history, songlines), or formal and official (i.e., certificates of milestones, birth certificate, legal proceedings, cultural plans, care plans, case notes). Regardless of what type of information it is, every person has the right to know their story, shape their story, stay connected to their story, and own (or at the very least access) all records related to that story.

Yet, for young people in out-of-home care, having a consistent and trusted place or person to safeguard stories and records can be challenging, particularly if placements are not stable. What is more, official records written about young people in care often do not include their voices. Also, many care leavers exiting the OOHC system report they cannot access some or all of their records in a timely manner and that the quality of records may be poor (redacted information, discriminatory language, and limited information about childhood).

CREATE spoke with 18 young people in the Northern Territory, aged between 18 and 25, to find out more about their experiences accessing records; the degree to which they were involved in creating their records; support people involved; and the types of information considered most important.



“ In a normal regular home you have this person in your life that would have this information. In out-of-home care you don't. So being able to access your records is important. You also have the right to be involved in decisions about you, and if there is a written record people can be held accountable. (Female, 21 years)

Background detail; reasons why I went into to care; [and] why I was moved around so much. It could hold information around why I have anger problems. (Female, 25 years)

Some information; they blacked it out. (Male, 18 years)

Medical docs, case files, and leaving care plans are really important only because when you're older and out of care and for employment or other schooling you need these things and young people miss out because they can't get them. (Female, 21 years)

More information [needed] around how to access records. (Male, 21 years)

Old photos are memories which is important to me. The ID is [also] really important for things I need like getting housing. (Female, 24 years)

A team to support you to get your files; having someone from that team follow up and check on you. (Female, 21 years)

It's important for me to understand and find out why people put so much judgement on me. My case notes are very important because people made assumptions on me based on those notes and I never understood why I would get turned away from carers just based of reading them. (Female, 25 years)

If there was things in there that was upsetting then maybe having my Aunty with me. (Female, 24 years)



Key Messages

Recordkeeping refers to both the making and management of records. Therefore, while young people frequently report difficulties with accessing records, other issues relate to what the records say, what they mean, and who controls them.

Accessing meaningful records can have a positive impact, affecting psychological (identity and self-hood); practical (ID documents), cultural (history and connection); and legal aspects of a young person's life.

Some significant incidents of concern raised by young people, however, include: poor records re-traumatising the young person; care leavers left waiting for documents, some reporting homelessness as a result; and feeling stigmatised and shamed by case notes.

Recordkeeping also has cultural implications. Young people identified that good quality records could be useful for kinship finding, and helping young people better connect with community. One young person also talked about the importance of having Aunty present for support when reviewing records. Family history and having family contacts was also mentioned by a number of participants. The Data Sovereignty principle further supports this by creating culturally safe recordkeeping reform; a decolonising of data where information rights are transferred to ACCOs and First Nations knowledge holders rather than the Department.

“Leaving care plan? I don't have any access to that. (Female, 22 years)

I received my leaving care plan a year after I left care. (Female, 22 years)

I'm pretty well supported and the more support I get the more confidence I get. (Male, 18 years)

I wanted to have a copy of my care notes but they declined me multiple times. I went into Territory Families to ask for them but they sat me down and said they would have to 'find' it first then they couldn't give it to me but give it to a psychologist for them to read it to me but I could tell they didn't want me to have it so I just forgot about it. They told me they would have to black out anything that contained other people. (Female, 22 years)

I don't think we should have to ask for any of our things, they should be ready for you to access and read whenever you want/need and then you don't have to wait so long. (Female, 21 years)

A link to the records, or something that could be sent to me, so that "bam I am in there." Not a struggle to get in. (Male, 19 years)

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Actions

Embed the rights of young people in recordkeeping practice so they can both contribute to what goes into their records and also have access to their records without delay or objection. Accessing records about oneself is a human right, and it is also instrumental in helping those with a care experience understand who they are.

Promote the safekeeping of personal records and provide more opportunities for young people to create personal and positive records that can be placed with a nominated authority for safekeeping.

Ensure records are informative, and language used is respectful and appropriate. Also ensure staff are adequately trained to carry out best practice in this space.

Provide dedicated records support and ease of access. Offer assistance to young people in the form of a support person/resource as they navigate the process of applying for records. Also provide targeted support when young people review their records. Support may also refer to having good communication procedures in place so that there is transparency in the recordkeeping process and young people feel comfortable asking for help and knowing where to go for help.

Implement the Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDS) Framework into recordkeeping practice. Data decision-making and sharing should be guided by the recommendations of ACCOs on how/what information is obtained and where the safekeeping place for such records is. Priority should also be made to ensure First Nations young people have access to information about family, culture, and kin.

Reduce the waiting times for accessing records. Timely responses for care-leavers seeking documents for independent living should be particularly prioritised.

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