

Caseworker Support in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT)

Listening to and understanding what young people with an out-of-home care experience in the ACT think of the level of support they receive from their caseworkers and how their relationship with their caseworker impacts the quality of that support is essential to support positive experiences in care.

In the ACT, CREATE interviewed 26 young people with an OOHC experience to find out about their experiences with caseworkers and the levels of support received. Areas asked about included caseworker characteristics, beginning and ending caseworker relationships, and suggestions for improvement.

32%
had no
scheduled
contact.

96%
preferred
in-person
contact.

65%
were
comfortable with
their current
caseworker.

37%
had a low level of
comfort in sharing
their feelings with
their
caseworker.

“

Give more structure and guidance. Connection starts with listening. Acknowledge my feelings, show me you understand, and reassure me that you are here to help with whatever I need. Try to see things from my perspective. By listening and empathizing with me, you will be showing me respect. (Young person, 16)

Be supportive and put in an effort and we will eventually open up and trust you if you mean well. (Young person, 18)

Work on the relationship building with me. Ensure they [caseworkers] understand my needs before speaking with me. Get to know me and show you actually care. (Young person, 15)

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Key Messages

- Clarity in communication and interactions that establish a personal understanding and relationship need to be encouraged.
- Caseworkers need to limit distractions and give the young person their full attention. Ineffective listening can diminish the support a young person is able to receive.
- Integrate fun into the contact between young people and caseworkers.

“Communication is the key. Make sure they maintain contact with me and check in on how I am doing more often. (Young person, 14)

- Key areas of change in the level of support that young people wanted to see included:
 - Ensuring young people are truly listened to by their caseworker
 - More emphasis on cultural safety and cultural awareness
 - Maintaining confidentiality - do not break their confidence
 - Breaking the ice and getting to know the young person (build relationships)
 - Incorporating fun into the visits, ensuring it is not all business
 - Giving more structure and guidance on ground rules
 - Ensuring caseworkers say goodbye appropriately and in-person when moving on
 - Effectively communicating with young people and their carers.

“I think all caseworkers should do what mine has done and start [with] the strategy of asking what activities kids would like to do for upcoming visits with the caseworker. Mine started a jar where we each placed 5 things we would like to do and [then] each time we chose one of those things and went and did that. (Young person, 18)

Actions

- Work in partnership with the child or young person in care and their carers. Help them feel at ease, communicate effectively, and maintain confidentiality.
- When there is a change of caseworker, ensure advanced notice and introduce the new caseworker early. Monitor for and minimise large numbers of caseworker changes.
- Support cultural safety and awareness by improving caseworker knowledge and skills (for example, through training), engaging caseworkers with a similar cultural background, and considering carers from the same culture.
- Give the young person a voice in decisions related to caseworker engagement. For example, let the young person choose some of the activities that they would like to engage in and ensure some of the activities are fun.

Consultation
completed in 2022

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