

DELEGATE STATEMENT

Over three days in Adelaide (21-23 March 2024), CREATE's Voices in Action Conference brought together more than 500 delegates, including young people with lived experience of out-of-home care, policy makers, service providers, researchers, carers and practitioners. Together, they discussed and thought about solutions to some of the toughest challenges within the care system.

Advocacy in action stream

Over the conference, we ran six 'live' Advocacy in Action sessions on key issues that affect children and young people in care. While the sessions were open to all delegates, we particularly wanted to hear what young people had to say about what needs to change in the out-of-home care system, because their voices direct our advocacy work. Insights from these sessions were used to create a Delegate Statement on 'key asks' to present to Governments and decision-makers on what needs to change to improve things for children and young people in care.

In the sessions, we worked through a problem logic of:

- What's working well?
- How could things be better?
- What would it take for things to be better?

These sessions focused on the following topics: transition supports (which included issues of housing and cost of living), education, residential care, sibling connections, and health and wellbeing. We also held a final reflection session where we tested our draft Delegate Statement.

The Delegate Statement was presented at the Closing Plenary session by our incredible Young Consultants as a final compelling call to action.



“It's a basic human right to have a safe place to live AND put food on the table” – 2024 Young Delegate

Transition supports including housing and cost of living

While some young delegates had positive experiences of accessing transition supports, many found it difficult to get support. Delegates thought some things could be better, including:

- access to information to know what is on offer
- for transition packages to be consistent across jurisdictions, and
- guaranteed housing because experiences of homelessness and housing insecurity were common.

As a next step, delegates called for the following actions:

- Support that extends beyond 21 to 25 or however long it's needed. They also wanted:
 - The Australian Government to increase the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA).
 - A consistent Independent Living Allowance for young people transitioning from care across all states and territories of \$16,000/year. They wanted this payment to be opt-out rather than opt-in and available for all young people transitioning from care, no exceptions.

“...everyone's stories are different and it shouldn't be a one size fits all or you receive no support because you don't meet too specific requirements.” – 2024 Young Delegate

- Rental support in the form of an allowance or subsidy in states where this is not available, and a rental skills program as part of planning for their transition. This could include -
 - Standardising a consistent 'Housing Allowance' for young people transitioning from care.
 - Rolling out CREATE's Sortli App across all jurisdictions and expanding the App to include more comprehensive rental skills advice.

“We've had an experience that nobody has been able to experience and it's so tough. You can feel lost and isolated.” – 2024 Young Delegate

“I'm stuck in limbo not knowing what I'm doing.” – 2024 Young Delegate

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“...there are some kids that get [transition supports] and some kids that get none of it.” – 2024 Conference Delegate

Transition supports including housing and cost of living

As a next step, delegates called for the following actions:

- Guaranteed housing because of experiences of homelessness and housing insecurity. This could include -
 - Extended home-based care placements. This would need to include the option of carer payments when young people stay in placements for longer (provided to carers until the young person turns 25) and amendment of the relevant legislation in each jurisdiction.
 - Guaranteed access to public or social housing and/or other innovative housing models.
 - Exploring and investing in innovative housing models, such as Supported Independent Living Services (SILS) and Youth Foyers, which can provide more supported accommodation options for care leavers.

“It is still inevitable that the circumstances and statistics are still there for us. They don’t disappear just because it’s been extended to 21.” – 2024 Young Delegate

“I actually wish I was younger because I’m lost without support.” – 2024 Young Delegate

“I have to pick between whether I buy food one fortnight or whether I go to therapy. It’s so upsetting that I literally have to pick between two necessary things for me to exist.” – 2024 Young Delegate

“I was told when leaving care that if the shelter had five beds and I was sixth in line then I would have nowhere to stay.” – 2024 Young Delegate

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“I can’t be worrying about homework when I don’t have a home.” – 2024 Young Delegate

Education

Delegates spoke about the barriers to engagement in education, including:

- Engagement in education is especially hard for children in residential care.

“Residential care workers wouldn’t take me to school because it was too far.” – 2024

Young Delegate

- They highlighted the impact of placement moves on education.
- The lack of access to funding for uniforms, textbooks, activities and camps, and the lack of access to the internet for school assignments.
- They suggested that individual learning styles are not being well supported.
- Mental health and trauma are not well understood and addressed in education settings.
- They said that information sharing should not come at the cost of privacy.

“...it’s a human right to have an education.” – 2024 Young Delegate

As a next step, delegates called for the following actions:

- Governments across Australia to commit to the provision of free education at all levels for children and young people with a care experience.
- Increase the availability of trades (with more diverse options), TAFE-based schools, and alternative learning programs which provide different avenues for engagement in education and building career pathways.
 - Develop a dedicated training package for teachers to enable them to better support children in care. This could include a strengths-based, relational and trauma-informed teaching practice framework.
 - Develop a national framework to address racism and stigma in schools.
 - Appoint cultural liaison officers to every school.
 - Case worker practice to include a deep focus on the educational goals of the young person as part of care planning and case management.



“Get to know me, not my file.” – 2024 Young Delegate

“You have every right to feel safe as a worker, but it’s my home. I have a right to feel safe there too.” – 2024 Young Delegate

Residential care

Delegates wanted significant improvements to be made to residential care, including:

- Ensuring there are Aboriginal carers for Aboriginal children and young people.
- For siblings to be placed together wherever possible and safe.
- Better placement matching of young people within residential homes.
- Overall, delegates wanted placements to be either kinship or foster placements and not residential.
- Residential care homes to move to 2-bedroom models with one-to-one staff to young person ratio.
- Careful recruitment of care workers so they are safe and responsive to children and young people.
- For care workers and all people in contact with residential care homes to ‘treat it like a home’.
- Choice, voice and agency for young people in relation to decisions that affect their lives.
- Address a culture in which young people need to use aggression to get what they need.
- Addressing practices of calling the police in response to trauma-related behaviours and distress.

“Remember it’s a young person’s home and not a workplace.” – 2024 Young Delegate

“Show love through time.” – 2024 Conference Delegate

“They couldn’t give me halal food so I just stopped eating. I wasn’t allowed to cook it myself because they didn’t let me use the kitchen.” – 2024 Young Delegate



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“I have never spoken to any young person who has had a good time in residential.” – 2024 Young Delegate

Residential care

As a next step, delegates called for the following actions:

- Increase funding for the foster and kinship care, including supports for carers, to reduce the need for residential care.

“The system is failing the carers as well.” – 2024 Conference Delegate

- Every child and young person in residential care should get their own bedroom. This is NOT the case in all jurisdictions.
- For care workers to celebrate important milestones with the young people in their care, including birthdays and special occasions.
- Increase efforts to make residential care homes look and feel like a home. This could include meaningful activities to connect care workers with children and young people e.g., ‘family dinners’ and ‘house yarns’.
- Voice, choice and having a say in all matters affecting them, including giving young people a say in who looks after them in residential care.
- For care workers to be culturally inclusive and attend to the needs of children with disabilities.
- Increase efforts to support family contact for children and young people in residential care where young people want this.

“Ensure family contact goes ahead the same way as foster and kinship care kids.”

– 2024 Young Delegate

- Move towards 2-bedroom models with one-to-one staff to young person ratio.
- Additional and specialised support for young people in residential care who are transitioning from care, including teaching independent living skills while young people are living in the residential care homes.

“Make sure young people get a bank account, licences, ID documents and Medicare.” – 2024 Young Delegate

“Better transition out of resi - stop discharging into homelessness.” – 2024 Young Delegate

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“Having your siblings with you is another layer of connection.” – 2024 Young Delegate

Sibling connections

Some young delegates had positive experiences of maintaining connections with their siblings while in care. This was made easier when case workers listened to children and young people’s wishes and followed through on this, and where carers really supported sibling connections.

However, many delegates called for some changes, including:

- Regular updates from their caseworkers about their siblings.
- Removing bureaucratic practices that get in the way of meaningful sibling contact.
- Supporting the use of social media to enable connection with siblings.
- Addressing practices such as threatening to take away sibling contact to manage young people’s behaviour.
- More understanding that, culturally, knowing your siblings helps keep you connected to culture and community.

“In my opinion, being with sibling is more than just love.” – 2024 Young Delegate

“Losing my siblings traumatised me a lot more.” – 2024 Young Delegate

“I believe in keeping Aboriginal siblings together because I am Aboriginal myself. I haven’t spoken to my siblings in 21 years...” – 2024 Young Delegate

As a next step, delegates called for the following actions:

- Where siblings cannot be placed together, efforts should be made to ensuring they are placed in the same area and attend the same school.
- Allocate the same case worker for sibling groups to support contact and connection.
- Fund and appoint a state-wide sibling connections coordinator in each jurisdiction (at least one FTE); and better resource family finding efforts. This could include organising camps and holidays for sibling groups.
 - Support older siblings to be able to advocate for younger siblings’ needs.
 - Ask older siblings (who are over 18) if they would be interested in being a kinship carer for their siblings and support them to take on the care younger siblings.
 - Consider investing in purpose-built community settings or clusters of housing for foster carers and the children in their care.
 - Increase flexibility around visits with siblings.



“Why can’t we have specialist support for young people in out-of-home care that have experienced trauma?” – 2024 Conference Delegate

Health and wellbeing

Delegates spoke about the barriers that get in the way of children and young people in care maintaining their health and wellbeing, including:

- Public healthcare wait lists are too long.
- Optical care is not adequate.
- Stability of placements and continuity of relationships are vital to supporting children and young people’s wellbeing.

“We all come from a place of trauma. We need free therapy.” – 2024 Young Delegate

“Stability is a must. Every single placement in the world should have stability. Without it, everything else falls apart.” – 2024 Young Delegate

As a next step, delegates called for the following actions:

- Prioritising initial health assessments to help with early diagnosis of health issues, including early screening for neurodiversity, and increasing access to early intervention services.
- Support children and young people with a care experience to navigate the health system by streamlining the referral process. This could include warm referrals.
- Bulk billing and priority access to health and mental health services for children and young people in care.
- Unlimited Medicare-subsidised psychology sessions for children and young people with a care experience.
- Health services and health professionals that are skilled in trauma-informed approaches and have an understanding of child protection and out-of-home care systems.
- Carer training to improve the support they provide to children with trauma-related behaviours and neurodiversity.
- Free monthly sanitary care packages provided to young people in care who menstruate.
- Flexibility and additional support for young people who are pregnant or have a baby.

“People will try to solve issues but sometimes I just need to be listened to.” – 2024 Young Delegate

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“I was blown away by the young people who shared their stories in the hope for a better future for all children and young people in care.” – 2024 Conference Delegate

“[The conference] really inspired me and showed me that change is happening.” – 2024 Young Delegate

Next steps

As one of our Young Consultants said when presenting the Delegate Statement at the Closing Plenary session:

“Sharing a space and voice can bring about immense power and change. To amplify your voice is also to empower the one beside you. Speak up, our stories are stronger together.”

– 2024 Young Delegate

CREATE is committed to elevating the voices of children and young people with a care experience to change the out-of-home care system and improve experiences for all children and young people in contact with child protection and care systems.

As such:

- We will share the Delegate Statement on the CREATE Foundation website, and through our Advocacy Wrap-up and clubCREATE magazine.
- We’ll use this statement as a call to action for all Governments to improve some things to better support children and young people with a care experience.
- CREATE’s Advocacy and Influencing Team, along with our Young Consultants, will take the Delegate Statement to meetings with key decision makers, sector partners and policy makers.
- We’ll keep you posted on our work to advocate for the changes our delegates have called for via our social media channels.

CREATE Foundation would like to say a BIG thank you to everyone for deeply engaging with these key issues. We would also like to extend a special thank you to all of our young delegates for sharing their personal stories and their insights and advice on the way forward. Your stories, stronger together.

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