



“It’s gotten to a point where you have to train yourself not to attach too much because you miss them [caseworkers]... I trained myself to do that and my friends said to me that it is okay to feel that – why do I have to train myself to deal with instability...”

## Ministerial Roundtable in NSW RESIDENTIAL CARE

On Tuesday 9 July 2024, young people in NSW led a Roundtable with the Hon. Kate Washington MP, Minister for Families and Communities to discuss their experiences of residential care.

They shared their own unique lived experience and workshopped tangible solutions that could create real change in the residential care system right now.

### Young people presented 3 key solutions:

- 1 Introducing a mentor support role for young people living in residential care,
- 2 Visitor sign-in process that is shared with and approved by young people living in the residential care home, and
- 3 Implementing a stronger complaints system.

If you want to be involved in the next Roundtable, email [nsw@create.org.au](mailto:nsw@create.org.au)

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FOUNDATION

# How did we get here?

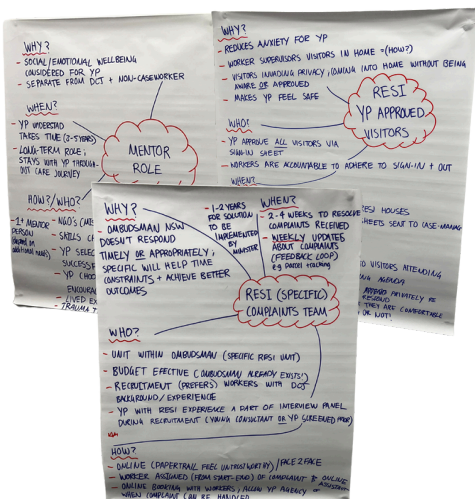
## SUP TRAININGS, YAGS & MORE YAGS



In the months leading up to the Roundtable, CREATE in NSW held a series of events including SUP training (CREATE’s youth empowerment program to help young people with a care experience develop high level advocacy skills) and consecutive YAGs (Youth Advisory Groups). At these events, young people worked collaboratively to answer:

1. What is working in residential care now?
2. How could things be better?
3. What would it take to make residential care better?

Young people explored all the different aspects that make up a strong policy solution, including how it would be resourced, consideration of recruitment to action each solution, training required, and timelines for implementation.



CREATE supported young people to design a space that felt safe and comfortable, ensuring they could raise their voices and concerns directly with the Minister.

This included developing a Team Charter for the day to which the Minister said, “[We] should start Parliament with this every day!”

CREATE even held a ‘mock Ministerial Meeting’ to prepare, by getting young people to develop solutions to improve residential care on the spot and present this to the ‘Mock Minister’!

# What we discussed

## SOLUTION 1: MENTOR ROLE

... having upwards of 30 case managers in a year creates such an instability within us... we want to trust people but how can we do this when they leave?

### Why?

- Addresses social and emotional wellbeing needs.
- Sits separate from Department for Communities and Justice (DCJ) and caseworkers.

### When?

- Young people understand this will take time and propose between 3-5 years.
- This should be a long-term role and the mentor should be a consistent person in the young person's life throughout their care journey.

### Who & how?

- One or more mentors depending on the young person's needs.
- Coordinated by NGOs because of mistrust young people feel towards DCJ.
- There should be a skills checklist (degree NOT required).
- Young people select profiles and can have a trial period to test for successful fit.
- Young people choose the meeting places & when to meet.
- Mentors should encourage, be engaging, positive and goal focused.
- Mentor could have lived experience; and should have trauma-informed training.

### Young people spoke about the need for a consistent person they can rely on:

Major issue that young people face is there doesn't feel like there is anyone there to support you... if someone doesn't care about you there is not much you can do about it.

Most of my caseworkers, I lost count of how many... I had to stop counting, I never really saw them and couldn't get in contact. When I did get the number (of my caseworker) they never answered. The few I had would lie and say they would do something and then didn't.

There is a big spectrum of problems for all of us, but it all comes back to instability and our solutions come back to mitigating this instability.

### Young people want a mentor to help them navigate residential care and life beyond the care system:

We have to be able to choose who you want [to be a mentor]. And need to trial it so if you are not getting anywhere, you should have a choice to change the person. You should have a right to say no to them.

This would help us to feel like we have someone in your corner they can be the advocate for you. Young people aren't trusted but maybe DCJ will trust them [the mentor].

We agreed that [the mentor] would work for you [i.e., the Minister's office] not for DCJ directly... there is tension with DCJ... and it comes from mistrust.

# What we discussed

## SOLUTION 2: VISITOR SIGN-IN PROCESS SHARED WITH AND APPROVED BY THOSE LIVING IN THE HOME



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It does feel weird having people you don't know coming in and out of your home and staff shift changes...

### Why?

- Reduces anxiety for young people living in the home.
- Workers supervise visitors in the home.
- Stops visitors from invading privacy; coming into the home without young people being made aware or approving this.
- Makes young people feel safe.

### When?

- 3-6 months.
- Standard practice for all residential care houses.
- Accountable practice; sign-in and out sheets to be sent to case-managers & house managers.

### Who?

- Young people to approve all visitors via a sign-in sheet.
- Workers are held accountable for signing-in and out.

### How?

- Visitors approved 1 week prior to visitors attending the house during a house meeting as a standing agenda item.
- House group chat for alerting young people about visitors with young people responding privately if they are comfortable or not.

Young people spoke about how not knowing who was going to enter their homes on a daily basis fractured their sense of safety:

“ I don't get access to the sign sheet... I don't get to see this.  
&  
It's bad when they drop in unannounced. ”

“ There was one point that I was so afraid... when you think you are being hunted by your dad and then someone comes into your home... you go into breakdown... how are you supposed to go to work or do anything because it trickles down. We need to be the ones to approve who is coming. ”

“ It's worse when you come back and people have been in my room (tradies) my housemate's headphones got stolen and they did nothing, called the police they came out and workers told them to go away. ”



# What we discussed

## SOLUTION 2: VISITOR SIGN-IN PROCESS SHARED WITH AND APPROVED BY THOSE LIVING IN THE HOME

More insights from young people about the impacts of not knowing who is coming and going at their homes:

“Just because it’s four walls and a roof doesn’t make it a home... we didn’t have keys to our rooms we couldn’t lock our doors. If we had an argument with carer we would have to stop mid argument to get them to unlock the door and sometimes they say no and then go and lock themselves in the office.”

“Why is there a doubled standard.. the workers know who is coming! When I ask who is coming I get told I can’t tell you, today has been a s\*\*\* show... I just get excuses and the next thing I see is someone on your veranda...”

“Young people want to be aware of and approve all visitors entering their home to increase their sense of agency and reduce the anxiety they feel when someone unknown enters their home.”

“The sign-sheet is already a thing but you [the Minister] could enforce that we have to see it, maybe implementing group chats where you could send a message e.g., ‘to all resi kids in the house we have this person coming at this time, date etc.’ This would help make sure they say it, and make sure it’s done.”

“At my house, every visitor comes through a door they have to fill out a form (name, time, details about who they are here to see/what they are here to do) but that does not help us because I am not allowed to look at it... That helps them and not me... I live in the house and they waltz in the door with a smile on your face and go to me awhhh you’re so cute and it’s always a super creepy smile like a shark smile it is creepy as.”

“All the issues stem, from the adults thinking they know better than you; that is why it is important to have young people in resi care having a say in who comes to the house.”

“Its where I stayed it should have been my home.”

“They [residential care workers] shouldn’t be acting like they have all the power and control.”

““

“It’s okay if it doesn’t happen in my life in care... I want it to help young people coming into the system and want them to have a good life.”

# What we discussed

## SOLUTION 3: RESI SPECIFIC COMPLAINTS TEAM

### Why?

- Ombudsman NSW doesn't respond in a timely or appropriate manner; having a specific team will help with time frames and achieve better outcomes.

### When?

- 1-2 years to be implemented by the Minister.
- Aim for 2-4 weeks to resolve complaints received.
- Weekly updates about complaints (feedback loop) via a tracking method e.g., similar to parcel tracking.

### Who?

- Unit within Ombudsman NSW (specific resi unit).
- Ombudsman already exists so it is budget friendly.
- Recruit workers with DCJ experience (preferred).
- Young people with residential care experience to be a part of an interview panel during recruitment (Young Consultant or young person screen prior).

### How?

- Online (paper trail to address currently feelings of mistrust)/ face to face.
- Worker assigned (from start to finish) to complaint & online assistant.
- Online booking with workers; this would give the young person agency over when the complaint will be handled.

Young people want their complaints to be resolved in a timely manner by a complaints team who understand their experiences and provide them with comprehensive updates throughout the process:

“ At the Ombudsman there is a team already you don't have to do anything else... they just need to be resi focused. ”

“ There needs to be young people involved in the recruitment of these positions. & There needs to be a digital footprint. ”

“ There need to be an agency that is able to hold everyone accountable. ”

“ To get issues resolved in a timely manner nothing works and there isn't a sense of accountability. ”

“ There could be parcel tracking for complaints – with complaints young people could get into contact to make a complaint either face-to-face or online; the tracking would be related to the online segment to track your application, state of the complaints. ”

“ Hoping to take resources from the existing Ombudsman – have a team within the Ombudsman that focusses on resi care to have them be more aware of how the system works and help us to solve the issues. ”

“ In my time in resi there were two options for complaints. The first was directly to the agency complaints team but that doesn't work well; or through the Ombudsman NSW but they have a large backlog and are inefficient. I submitted a complaint and they got back to me a year later... it took a total of 2 years...” ”



# Wrap-up

## NSW ROUNDTABLE

Young people asked Minister Washington if their ideas were implementable:

Minister Washington reflected on what the young people had discussed with her and reiterated that she and her team will be “addressing safety in residential care houses now – we will be looking at this and trying to enforce this.” She also indicated that the young people’s solutions around mentoring and complaints will be considered in the future system. The Minister said that “accountability and the relational aspect is really key” to the new system!

Minister Washington also reflected on the need for greater accountability especially in relation to children and young people’s rights in care:

“We need to ensure we have a system that acknowledges this and supports young people... We want to be empowering you all to be the amazing people you are.”

The Minister shared her vision for reforming the child protection system:

“A big goal of mine is to ensure that we are stepping in sooner with families... to be able to provide families with access to supports to be better parents (that includes health, education, housing, mental health supports and ensuring young people can get a diagnosis) before they are in crisis point. We don’t want kids to be harmed.”

Lastly, young people asked Minister Washington if they could be involved in mapping out the reform process. She said:

“Yes, we want to ensure the steps we take are informed by the young people.”

Overall, Minister Washington committed to immediate action to implement one of the three solutions young people proposed.

She also commented that the mentor role and resi specific complaints team would be considered as part of broader plans to reform the child protection system in NSW.

Young people will be taking the Minister's feedback on board for the next round table and are excited to get started on planning for this!

# What's next?

## YOUNG PEOPLE AND CREATE WILL VISIT THE NSW PARLIAMENT!



Minister Washington will be hosting a group of young people with a care experience (and CREATE staff) at an event in Parliament in October 2024 during NSW's Children's Week.

We'd like to give a huge shoutout to our CREATE intern Alice for suggesting this idea to the Minister. This visit is a massive win for all the young people in NSW with a care experience and is a brilliant opportunity for young people to speak directly with decision-makers.

CREATE would like to say a BIG thank you to all the young people who led such powerful discussions with Minister Washington on the day, and all the young people who helped to plan and workshop solutions for change that will improve the experiences for young people living in residential care right now!

As one young person said at the close of the Roundtable:

“It's gonna take a long time for young people to speak up because of the trauma and damage done to them; the lies and the damage the system has done to them. It will take a while for us to fix it but as long as we work together we can fix it.”

If you want to be involved in the next Roundtable, email [nsw@create.org.au](mailto:nsw@create.org.au)

The logo for CREATE FOUNDATION, featuring the word 'create' in a stylized, rounded font with a white outline, and 'FOUNDATION' in a smaller, sans-serif font below it, all set against a purple circular background.