



'This matters to us'

Lived experience insights from children and young people with care experience, 2024-2025



CREATE Foundation acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners of the lands, skies, and waters where we live, learn and work.
This land, now called Australia, was never ceded.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present, as well as to knowledge holders and community leaders across all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

We recognise that this nation is home to the world's oldest living and continuing cultures. We recognise and learn from the knowledge, strength, resilience, the power and healing of Truth Telling, Voice and strongly support Treaty, in Victoria and throughout Australia.

We honour over 60,000 years of raising children with care and love, strong, proud, and connected to Culture and Country.

We recognise, that the harm caused through the Stolen Generations, continues to permeate child protection systems and practices throughout Australia. We recognise that many of the 10,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people who are our members experienced profound disruption to their connection with Culture and Country due to their removal from their families and placement into out-of-home care. We strongly support self-determined approaches to remedy the harms caused through past and current child protection systems and practices.





Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs) are a key component of CREATE's youth empowerment initiatives. They provide young people with a lived experience in out-of-home care a platform to share their insights, experiences, and recommendations for improving the care system. Through YAGs, young people identify key issues and advocate for meaningful change.

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Connected, courageous, change makers.

Topics are set by young people, on their terms

At the beginning of each financial year, young people in many jurisdictions get together to plan Youth Advisory groups topics to discuss over the next 12 months. As their consumer body, CREATE Foundation is trusted to support this plan and provide a safe space for its members, and make contemporaneous records and notes to amplify these conversations to Ministers, Departments, Sector and Community leaders. This report provides a summary of these insights.

CREATE Foundation invites decision makers to listen, learn, and make change

In each jurisdiction throughout Australia, CREATE Foundation makes space, provides support, and facilitates safety and connection between children and young people with care experiences. This connection and peer support is powerful, and supports identity, development and validation. CREATE Foundation provides the methods, settings and tools for children and young people who want to get involved in systems advocacy.

Connect

In 2024-2025 there were 31,994 children and young people who connected as members of clubCREATE, with 10,124 members identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Empower

During 2024-2025 CREATE Foundation Youth Advisory Groups continued to be a space open to all children and young people with care experience, from their first contact with out-of-home care system and up until the age of 25. This consistent space gives an opportunity to build a community that fosters peer support and shared experiences. Over the financial year CREATE facilitated 99 Youth Advisory Groups, with 669 children and young people attending, including 306 children and young people who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Through Youth Advisory Groups, conversations and topics are led by children and young people. CREATE Foundation Program Facilitators are always present to provide safety and support, as well as capture and amplify the insights shared to advocate for a better system and better outcomes for everyone living in out-of-home care. All quotes in this report are the exact words of children and young people, with all identifying demographic information not disclosed, and some features shared by exception to support meaning and assist in understanding context of the experience.

Change

In addition to Youth Advisory Groups, CREATE Foundation's Speak Up (SUP) programs offer young people development opportunities in leadership, communication and advocacy skills. During the year 389 young people participated in Speak Up programs, with 198 identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Graduates of SUP become CREATE Foundation Young Consultants, and continue to be supported to develop their leadership and advocacy. CREATE Young Consultants have transformed the landscape of child participation and lived experience advocacy throughout Australia, and are leaders supporting work of the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Peak bodies, Sector and Service Delivery governance groups – and including child protection, family violence and child rights fields. The insights from SUP are not included in this report.

National themes

Lived experience insights from children and young people with care experience, 2024-2025

Between July 2024 and June 2025 there were 99 Youth Advisory Groups held around Australia.

669 children and young people attended, with 306 children and young people who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Transitioning from Care

Mental health, self care and wellbeing

Carers, caseworkers and relationships

Identity, inclusion and rights

Education and life skills

Creative expression and digital tools

Housing and independence

Youth
Advisory
Groups



National Themes

National Experience to Action Board (Youth) – NEABY

The National Experience to Action Board (Youth), represents a young consultant/s from each jurisdiction. During 2024-2025 NEABY members met throughout the year to provide strategic advice and identified advocacy priorities for CREATE Foundation – these are reflected in the Strategic Plan for 2024-2027. The priorities and what we are advocating for are provided below and set the scene for what matters for young people with care experience throughout Australia, and how the system needs to change.

Who we heard from

Between July 2024 and June 2025 there were 99 Youth Advisory Groups held around Australia. 669 children and young people attended, with 306 children and young people who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Key themes and insights

During the Youth Advisory Groups, young people shared their insights and experiences of:

- **Mental health, self care and wellbeing** - Young people spoke openly about the importance of looking after their minds and bodies, how trauma impacts everyday life, and why safe spaces and support systems really matter.
- **Transitioning from care-** Young people shared their hopes, challenges, and practical ideas for making the move into adulthood smoother and more supported.
- **Housing and independence** - Access to safe, stable housing, and the support needed to live independently was raised in multiple Youth Advisory Groups with young people, highlighting gaps and solutions.
- **Carers, caseworkers and relationships** - Whether it was about building better connections with carers, getting real support from caseworkers, or strengthening sibling ties, relationships were a major focus.
- **Education and life skills** – Young people called for better trauma-informed school environments, stronger academic support, and real-world skills like budgeting and voting.
- **Identity, inclusion and rights** - Young people explored what it means to express their identity and culture in safe, inclusive environments. They tackled big topics like gender equality, reconciliation, stigma, cultural connection, and child rights across every state and territory.
- **Creative expression and digital tools** - Some Youth Advisory Groups got hands-on with tools like the Sortli app (an application designed and developed by CREATE), giving feedback to improve support for care leavers. Others used creative storytelling and art to explore their experiences and push for change.

Advocacy priorities

The conversations and focus of conversation in Youth Advisory Groups throughout the year was consistent with the advocacy priorities identified by young people in the development of the CREATE Foundation Strategic Plan, 2024-2027, and reaffirm the key priorities and what we are advocating for - 'What we want'.

Safety and stability in care

Every child and young person in care deserves a stable, safe and supportive home that prioritises their needs, relationships, and community ties.

Every child deserves someone who consistently shows up for them with warmth and care. CREATE acknowledges that relational safety and continuity are essential for the wellbeing and development of children and young people. For those in care, when living with family isn't an option, stable placement arrangements are critical. This means placements that prioritise young people's sense of safety and respond to their individual needs, minimising disruption in their lives and supporting continuity of caring relationships and community connections. Children and young people also need to be actively involved in placement decisions so they have a say about where they live.

What we want

1. **Prioritising sibling placements**
 - Ensuring siblings are placed together whenever possible to maintain their bond.
2. **Meaningful and regular connections**
 - Creating opportunities for children and young people to connect with siblings, kin and family in ways that are consistent, meaningful and in line with their wishes.
3. **Transparency and communication**
 - Keeping children and young people informed about their family members and what is happening in their lives.
4. **Support for maintaining connections**
 - Providing resources, guidance, and support to carers and caseworkers to facilitate ongoing family relationships.
5. **Young people's voices**
 - Actively involving children and young people in decisions about family contact, ensuring their wishes and needs are respected.

Relationships

Safe, consistent, and meaningful relationships are the foundation of safety and wellbeing for children and young people in care.

Like everyone, children and young people need safe, responsive and meaningful relationships to be safe and well. This means trusted relationships with safe adults who listen to them, act on what they say, show warmth and show up for them in an ongoing way. Unfortunately, children and young people in care often experience disrupted relationships with family, carers and caseworkers.

CREATE is fiercely committed to influencing systems, policy frameworks, service models and practice approaches to elevate relationships as the most important thing when it comes to child safety and wellbeing. We envisage a future care system that operates as a 'care community' of networked relationships, that prioritise children's right to safe, enduring and responsive relationships as a paramount concern.

What we want

1. **Prioritising relationships in care systems**
 - Systems, policies, and practices that place relationships at the heart of decision-making and service delivery.
2. **Consistency in care relationships**
 - Support for carers and caseworkers to build and sustain long-term, trusting relationships with young people.
 - Minimising disruptions in relationships caused by system changes, placement moves, or workforce turnover.
3. **Supporting family connections**
 - Opportunities and resources for children and young people to maintain safe and meaningful connections with family members.
4. **Building a care community**
 - A collaborative care system that operates as a 'care community,' fostering networked relationships among children, carers, families, and professionals.
5. **Listening and acting on young voices**
 - Ensuring children and young people are heard and that their views influence decisions about their relationships and care experiences.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander self-determination

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have a right to connection, culture, and community through self-determined, culturally-informed care.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led and designed approaches are essential for meeting the needs of First Nations children and young people, and reducing the disproportionate number of First Nations children in statutory care. CREATE supports Aboriginal-led commissioning to put resources and decision-making power in the hands of First Nations communities, including proportionate investment in the community-controlled sector to enable culturally-informed services, based on community need. CREATE recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's right to connection to Country, culture, lore, spiritual systems, cultural protocols and practices, language, kin, clan and community as a major protective factor that can heal families, embody identity, reclaim pride and grow kids strong. CREATE also supports data sovereignty for First Nations communities and Aboriginal-led oversight of child protection systems, including dedicated Commissioners for Aboriginal Children and Young People in all jurisdictions, with a full mandate to oversee all systems impacting on the lives of First Nations children and young people.

What we want

1. **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led approaches**
 - First Nations communities leading and designing care models and family support approaches to meet the needs of their children and young people.
 - Self-determination for First Nations people, communities and sector in relation to individual and collective decision-making.
2. **Community-controlled services**
 - Proportionate investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations to deliver culturally-informed services, based on community needs.
3. **Connection to culture**
 - Supporting children's rights to connection with Country, culture, lore, spiritual systems, protocols, practices, language, kin, clan, and community as a protective factor that strengthens identity, wellbeing and resilience.
 - Recognising connection to culture and community as essential pathways to healing families and building strong futures.
4. **Data sovereignty**
 - Ensuring First Nations communities have ownership and control over data that impacts their children and young people.
5. **Independent oversight**
 - Establishing dedicated Commissioners for Aboriginal Children and Young People in all jurisdictions, empowered to oversee systems affecting First Nations children.

Rights, diversity and inclusion

Every young person has the right to have their identity affirmed and be supported in a way that helps them thrive.

Every young person has a right to be affirmed in their unique identity, and receive inclusive support that empowers them to thrive physically, emotionally, culturally and socially. CREATE advocates for shifts to a rights-based child protection system that elevates the voices and rights of children and young people. This means policies and systems that enable children and young people to be involved in decision-making about their individual journey in care, as well as decision-making about system reform. It also means service models and practice approaches that are safe and responsive to young people with different abilities, cultural backgrounds, genders and sexualities, and neurodiversity.

What we want

1. **Rights-based child protection system**
 - Shift towards a system that prioritises the voices and rights of children and young people in all aspects of care and decision-making.
2. **Listening to children keeps them safe**
 - Being informed about their rights, participating in decisions affecting them, and being taken seriously are critical elements of child safety.
3. **Involvement in decision-making**
 - Ensure children and young people are involved in decisions about their individual care journey and the broader systems that impact their lives.
4. **Inclusive service models**
 - Develop service models and practices that are safe, inclusive and responsive to young people from diverse backgrounds, including abilities, cultures, genders, sexualities, and neurodiversity.



Residential care

Family preservation and early intervention are essential to avoid children entering care. When kids do enter care, home-based models are best suited to help kids thrive. Where residential care is necessary, it should provide meaningful relationships between care workers and young people, stability, therapeutic models, positive and responsive home environments, and holistic supports.

CREATE advocates for a systemic shift towards family preservation and early intervention when there are safety and wellbeing concerns for children. CREATE also advocates for home-based and relational care models that meet children's developmental and relational needs through continuity of relationships with carers. Where residential options are needed, CREATE calls for major improvements to the quality, stability, safety and model of care through better home environments in residential settings, smaller homes (unless catering for sibling groups), staffing models and practice approaches that prioritise meaningful relationships between workers and young people, and therapeutic models that address a holistic range of issues and needs affecting young people (with a particular focus on addressing mental health needs).

What we want

1. **Family preservation and early intervention**
 - A systemic shift that increases investment in family preservation and early intervention to support children's safety and wellbeing, reduce the need for care, and address the disproportionate number of First Nations children in care.
2. **Home-based care models**
 - Promote home-based models like kinship and foster care, which better meet children's developmental and relational needs through continuity of relationships with carers.
3. **Improvement of residential care**
 - Where residential care is needed, we advocate for: Smaller homes (unless catering for sibling groups) to improve quality and safety, staffing models that prioritise meaningful relationships between workers and young people, and therapeutic care models that address the holistic needs of young people, with a strong focus on mental health support.

Sibling, kin and family connection

Strong sibling, kin, and family connections are essential for identity, belonging, and emotional resilience for young people in care.

In line with children and young people's individual wishes, the care system should prioritise ongoing opportunities to nurture sibling, kin and family relationships while they are living in out-of-home care. These connections serve as a protective factor, promoting identity and meaning, relational continuity, and emotional resilience. These connections also enhance stability, and promote a sense of belonging among young people who may be facing disruptions in other aspects of life. Above all, it is what young people tell us they need and want.

What we want

1. **Prioritising sibling placements**
 - Ensuring siblings are placed together whenever possible to maintain their bond.
2. **Meaningful and regular connections**
 - Creating opportunities for children and young people to connect with siblings, kin and family in ways that are consistent, meaningful and in line with their wishes.
3. **Transparency and communication**
 - Keeping children and young people informed about their family members and what is happening in their lives.
4. **Support for maintaining connections**
 - Providing resources, guidance, and support to carers and caseworkers to facilitate ongoing family relationships.
5. **Young people's voices**
 - Actively involving children and young people in decisions about family contact, ensuring their wishes and needs are respected.

Health and wellbeing

Health and wellbeing support is critical to improving life outcomes for children and young people in care.

Children and young people in care often experience more health challenges than their peers, both while in care and after care, which can impact long-term quality of life and health outcomes. Child safety and health systems need to work together to prioritise access to assessments, early intervention services and targeted specialist supports for children and young people in care, tailored to meet their unique needs. CREATE calls for comprehensive health assessments for children entering care, health assessments annually while in care, access enhancements for young people living in regional areas, priority access and express pathways to diagnostic services and NDIS supports, and targeted mental health service models for young people in care that address the impacts of trauma.

What we want

1. **Comprehensive health assessments**
 - Health assessments for all children entering care.
 - Annual health assessments while in care to monitor and address ongoing needs.
2. **Improved access in regional areas**
 - Enhancements to healthcare services for children and young people living in regional and remote areas.
3. **Priority access to services**
 - Priority and fast-tracked pathways to diagnostic services and NDIS supports for children and young people in care.
4. **Targeted mental health supports**
 - Trauma-informed mental health service models, tailored to the needs of children and young people in care.
5. **Collaboration across systems**
 - Strengthened collaboration between child safety, disability and health systems to ensure seamless access to interventions and supports.

Education

Equitable access to education is key to empowering children and young people in care to pursue their aspirations.

Equitable access to quality education for young people in out-of-home care is essential for their development, and for the provision of accessing opportunities to work towards individual aspirations and interests. However, children and young people in care commonly experience major disruption to their education, barriers to participate, and stigma. CREATE is committed to mobilising partners across education and child protection sectors to do better for children and young people in care, through practice improvements, better placement decisions, transport solutions to get to school, flexible funding to cover school gear, streamlined permissions to engage in school activities, bridging programs and alternative education pathways, and dismantling barriers and stigma that make it hard for children and young people to engage in education.

What we want

1. **Practice improvements**
Foster collaboration between education and child protection sectors to enhance support for young people in care.
2. **Better placement decisions**
– Ensure placements prioritise proximity to schools and continuity in education.
3. **Transport solutions**
– Provide reliable and accessible transportation options to help children and young people attend school consistently.
4. **Flexible funding**
– Cover essential school costs such as uniforms, books, technology, and extracurricular activities.
5. **Streamlined permissions**
– Simplify processes to allow children and young people to engage in school activities without unnecessary delays and exclusion.
6. **Bridging programs and alternative pathways**
– Offer programs to help young people catch up on missed education and explore non-traditional pathways that suit their interests.
7. **Addressing barriers and stigma**
– Tackle systemic barriers and combat the stigma that discourages young people in care from fully engaging in education.

Youth justice and raising the age

Reforming youth justice systems is essential to break cycles of criminalisation and ensure children are supported, not detained.

Australian youth justice systems need urgent and major reform so that children and young people are no longer criminalised or detained. CREATE believes that children with a care experience (particularly those living in residential care) are disproportionately criminalised as a result of social disadvantage, experiences of adversity and trauma, the impact of racism, poverty, unsafe and unstable housing, unsupported mental health needs and substance issues, and practice issues resulting in high levels of contact with police. In line with overwhelming evidence and expert opinion, CREATE strongly believes that raising the age of criminal responsibility is a critical step in reforming the youth justice system. This means all Australian governments should raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years (without exception), the minimum age of detention to 16 years, and invest in comprehensive diversion and early intervention supports, to reduce offending and interrupt the cycles of contact with justice systems into adulthood. CREATE also calls for child-centred, trauma-informed and therapeutic services for all children who come into contact with the criminal justice system.

What we want

1. **Raise the age**
 - Increase the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14 years (without exception) and the minimum age of detention to 16 years.
2. **Trauma-informed and therapeutic services**
 - Provide child-centred, trauma-informed, and therapeutic services for all children who come into contact with the justice system.
3. **Comprehensive diversion supports**
 - Invest in early intervention and diversion programs to address underlying causes of offending and reduce contact with justice systems into adulthood.
4. **Addressing disproportionate criminalisation of children in care**
 - Tackle the over-representation of children with a care experience—particularly those in residential care—within the justice system, by addressing systemic factors such as racism, poverty, trauma, and lack of support for mental health and housing needs.
5. **End the criminalisation of children**
 - Implement reforms to ensure children are supported through community-based responses rather than being criminalised or detained.

Transition to independence

Every young person leaving care should have access to the support, resources and stability needed for a successful transition.

Young people often describe transitioning from care to independence as a stressful, unsupported and unsafe experience. CREATE calls on all jurisdictions to implement and maintain robust transition support packages (that include adequate allowances) to ensure real choices and housing options for young people. This must be supported by arrangements that allow young people to engage in work or study aligned with their aspirations. CREATE advocates for supports, allowances and housing guarantees for young people leaving care up to the age of 25 years. CREATE will continue to monitor transition packages available in each jurisdiction to ensure young people receive equitable opportunities and resources for their emergence into independence.

What we want

1. **Equitable resources across jurisdictions**
 - Ensure all young people have access to consistent and equitable transition opportunities and resources, regardless of their location.
2. **Robust transition support packages**
 - Provide strong transition packages, including adequate allowances, to ensure young people have real choices and housing options as they transition from care.
3. **Support until 25**
 - Guaranteed housing, financial and emotional support for young people leaving care up to the age of 25.
 - Increase the Commonwealth Government's Transition to Independent Living Allowance from \$1,500 to \$10,000.
 - Increase State Government independent living allowances to \$16,000 per year.
4. **Opportunities for work and study**
 - Create flexible arrangements that enable young people to engage in work or study aligned with their aspirations.

Western Australia

Lived experience insights from children and young people with care experience, 2024-2025

Between July 2024 and June 2025 there were 10 Youth Advisory Groups held in Western Australia.

59 young people attended these sessions to share their insights and lived experiences.

Are you listening?



Western Australia

Who we heard from

Between July 2024 and June 2025, CREATE Foundation facilitated 10 Youth Advisory Group sessions in and around Perth. 59 young people attended these sessions to share their insights and experiences.

Key themes and insights

During the Youth Advisory Groups, young people shared their insights and experiences of:

- How a care experience and health and wellbeing interact
- Access to health care
- Stigma and discrimination
- Quality of health care and oversight by caseworkers
- Health communication challenges
- Recommendations to improve health services
- World Care Day 2025: Personal Strength
- How the OOHC System Can Support Young People's Growth
- Youth Week 2025: 'Our Threads, This Place, Your Moment'
- Regional Experiences of the Out-Of-Home Care (OOHC) System.

Health and wellbeing

How a Care Experience and Health and Wellbeing Interact

Young people described how care experiences and experiences of adversity and trauma impact health:

"Disproportionate amount of people in care suffer from health conditions because of their trauma, and don't know how to put self-care and healthcare into practice. They need skills to self-manage health and advocate for health."

"We know [for] people who live in heavy trauma environments, it raises cortisol and affects brain function. It completely alters the way the body reacts to stress..."

"I had to pause our [therapy] sessions because my mental health wasn't so good when I changed placements."

"They never included fruit and veggies in our meals in resi home."

Access to Health Care

Young people spoke of challenges accessing health care and getting appropriate support:

"I recently found out I have lots of chronic health issues. When I was in care, no one would ever take me to the doctor. I've been diagnosed with so much in the last year. Even though I had so many illnesses in my family, including asthma. But no one would take me to get checked out and treated. My doctor now is really good because he specialises in chronic illnesses..."

"It's impossible to be seen."

"It's hard to manage medical treatments. Most doctors don't bulk bill after the age of 12 and as a result some cannot afford doctor appointments."

"Early intervention testing for young people for major health conditions that may not be covered by Medicare until symptoms develop."

Stigma and Discrimination

Young people also mentioned stigma and discrimination in the health care system:

"We may not be believed about our symptoms because children in care have a specific stereotype, especially for doctors or DCP workers"

"You want to know scary facts? The average amount of appointments that I had to attend to get it taken seriously was 10... 10 appointments of me asking the exact same question."

"Doctors do not take you seriously."

"Doctors can be dismissive if you have a complex health condition."

Quality of Health Care and Oversight by Caseworkers

Young people reflected on the quality of care provided to children and young people with a care experience, and issues with caseworker oversight:

"In my case notes it was written [that] I have attention seeking behaviours, that I create medical symptoms when there are none."

"I thought it was normal to be in pain because that's what's my case workers told me."

"I can say, if you sent me home without paperwork, I'll be the only one who cares, because none of my carers care. I can confidently say that, because when I was looking [for a] diagnose...I was having to do that alone... my carers are only around three to six months, and then they're gone and you have to move somewhere else..."

As well as opportunities for change, and some things that might help the quality of health care available to them:

"If doctors were trauma informed and had more time as a doctor to spend time with their patients for them to get the best quality of life and overall, more experienced."

"Having an additional case file for just health and wellbeing."

Health Communication Challenges

Young people raised concerns about poor communication by health providers:

"Listen to young people's health needs – don't dismiss our symptoms."

"I was put on medication while in care, without understanding the potential side effects."

"Nobody listened to me."

"I've spent my whole life in care and been medically unwell the whole time, but nobody listens."

And about reproductive health and contraception:

"If you don't take the pill, you're forced to have the rod (contraceptive implant). I was sedated and because I was under the age of 16 [age 13] I couldn't say no."

"I was also forced to have the rod [age 14] and I had to beg for sanitary products. My foster parents made me pay for them out of my pocket money. It was a really bad time for me when I was put on the rod - it made me more suicidal than I would have been."

Recommendations to Improve Health Services

Young people made several recommendations to improve health services for children and young people with a care experience:

"I think what the system can do better in the needs of the children and carers in the system, is to have a consistent check-up and conversation to check in with how they are doing, and to possibly as well, offer therapy or counselling to help and support the children and carers through the ups and downs, as I know first-hand this would've helped a whole lot when my foster home needed it."

"Provide more bulk billing services or provide a government subsidy or pool of funding from the Department to support young people in care and those who have transitioned out to access medical services."

"...written acknowledgement or a certificate written by the department, explaining the entitlements of health support for OOH young people and a health transcript."

"...education on the effects of child protection system and sector on youth and having a unit or program for youth workers and professionals in the sector and hearing firsthand voices and the effects it has on post care."

"More education for young people on how trauma can affect their bodies in the future. Signs to look out for and health conditions. Education on how to let young people have greater opportunities to advocate for themselves."

Personal growth, strengths and experiences in care

World Care Day 2025: "Celebrating Every Journey"

In February 2025, a Youth Advisory Group was held as part of the World Care Day 2025 celebrations. The theme for the year was "Celebrating Every Journey." Guest speaker Sharla Abdullah, the Advocate for Children in Care, shared insights from her work, which resonated with many Young Consultants involved in similar fields. We also discussed the personal strengths that everyone has developed as a result of their experiences in the Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) system. Young people shared their strengths and what they mean to them:

"Strengths are things that get me through every day; they get me from point A to point B."

"Strengths are the ability to always move forward with life."

"My strengths are resilience and practical strengths, like cooking."

"Strengths are my family connection."

"My strength is being able to speak up for people when they aren't getting heard."

Young people also discussed how their experiences in care and with Child Protection and Family Services (CPFS) have given them strengths:

"The way which children band together and move together as they get older. To have that stability and closeness"

"I was told I wouldn't be able to live by myself. I'm now going FIFO for work"

"Resilience: the ability to know myself and not feel guilty about sharing what I believe."

A young person also shared their powerful reflection about owning their story and finding strength beyond others' opinions:

"I had a lot of case workers who put down my thoughts and feelings saying I wouldn't achieve... I had to work hard on myself to see myself outside other people's opinions. Like how I dressed, ate and acted. Along with what parts of my story I shared. I own my experience and have the power to share."

Then, young people reflected meaningfully on areas of personal growth they are still developing. One participant shared her thoughts on money management: *"I wish I was good at money saving. My husband is a saver. [For me] I see, I want, and I buy."* Another young person spoke about their aspiration to have: *"self-confidence[in] who I am as a person and what decisions I make."* Another young person highlighted their challenges to express emotions: *"Communicating how I feel to people when I am upset. Sometimes I wish I had a wand and could put a spell on them."*

How the OOH System Can Support Young People's Growth

Young people discussed how the Department of Communities, Child Protection and Family Support Division (DoC) contributes and could contribute more to the development of their personal strengths. They shared DoC could support their growth and future by:

"Listen[ing] to kids and provide real solutions tailored to individuals."

"Being transparent with us"

"Giving us more opportunities to make friends."

Young people also expressed their passion and hobbies, highlighting how these interests can support their growth and future aspirations:

"Playing sports like soccer."

"My hobbies that help me grow are reading, art, walking, and guitar."

Young people shared on how the support from their schools and teachers helps them to reach their full potential:

"My teachers help me grow by helping me find passions."

"Being able to have a big and good lunch helps me focus."

"We need more Education Assistants (EA) at our school."

"More EA's but only if they are kind. I've had some before that aren't very kind when I'm struggling."

Young people also expressed their views on how the DCP can help support and nurture their growth for them to be able to thrive in the future:

"I want to be an Archaeologist, maybe some help in the right direction would be nice"

"I want to be an astronaut."

"I want to get back home (birth family)."

For some young people, they identified their need for medical and health support services, to help them thrive:

"I want DCP to better opportunities for hospitalisations in the future."

Sometimes they are hard to get admitted."

Youth Week 2025: 'Our Threads, This Place, Your Moment'

Two Youth Advisory Groups were held on the WA Youth Week 2025 theme 'Our Threads, This Place, Your Moment', in and around Perth. Young Consultants composed a series of questions around the week's theme to be explored in our Youth Advisory Group conversations.

For CREATE young people the 'Our Threads' represented their interconnectedness and young people coming together across WA to share their stories and experiences.

Young people discussed, "Who is someone that makes your life brighter and more fun — and how do they do that?" The responses included:

"My brother makes my life brighter because he makes me laugh. I enjoy hanging out with my friends and playing basketball." (child)

"My friends who make me laugh." (child)

"My carer makes my life brighter by existing. She looks after me and cooks for me. Her making me dinner makes my days better."

"My teacher, because he helps me know my time. He also helps me write in class." (child)

"My cousin Tyrone, because he plays footy with me." (child)

"My friend because I can play with him all the time at school. I like when he can come to my house, and we can play and ride our bikes." (child)

"My friend, who I play basketball with. He helps train me to be better at basketball." (child)

They also considered, how their connections with others shape their OOHC experience. Connection to the love and support of family, including foster family, and carers and caseworker was a strong common influence on positive experiences when living in care.

"My most important connection is my foster mum. She's been the biggest supporter in my life. My other friends have come and gone, and she's always been there for me"

"My biggest supporter is my brother. Having him there is so good. He has friended me on Fortnite so we can play together. If I get bullied on Fortnite my brother can protect me."

"I know for me, I think it was good for me having my foster mum around. Even when I was in a group home I could try get hold of mum. Sometimes the Dept would lie and say I couldn't get hold of her; there were a couple of years I didn't see her. But I've lived with her six times, she's always been there for me when I need her."

"I think having a discussion with a carer [is important]. Case workers should make sure we can get in contact – pass on our phone number so they can check in with us when we're moving around" "I found for me, once a worker got to see my mum, I got comfortable with them because they were getting along with my parents."

"My [foster] mum has his [brother's foster] mum's phone number, and they organise our connections."

The concept of 'This Place' invited investigation of the physical and social environments that young people inhabit and invited celebration of the diverse communities and landscapes that make up WA. For CREATE Young Consultants 'This Place' prompted the questions "What's your favourite thing about the place where you live, and why?" and "How has the Department of Communities influenced your values in your environment?"

For children and young people their favourites places were most often where they were connected to love.

"I like living with my brother because he makes me laugh." (child)

"I get to live close to my friends."

"My dog is my favourite because he plays with me". (child)

"My nan's is my favourite place because all my cousins are there."

Sometimes 'This Favourite Place' was where their bed is.

"My favourite thing is my bed." (child)

"My bed because I like to rest. I like having my own room with a big bed."

The discussion about how the environments for young people overseen by the Department of Communities influences children and young people's values, was wide ranging and experiences varied, but valuing safe, stable caring relationships and family, both biological and chosen, was shared by most of the young people.

"I've never really had much help from the department. Even if I asked for help, they'd say they'd do something, and they never followed up. My placement was good but in general I'm always trying to figure everything out on my own."

"A few of the placements they (DCP) gave me weren't great. When I was living with my horse that wasn't a great time. I ended up having to live at the stables over a weekend because I didn't know where to go. It wasn't safe and I had to contact crisis care."

"Instead of just being put in a new house, [it would be better if you could] go outside somewhere fun before you move in so you're not complete strangers. They [children, young people and staff] have all their rules, unspoken rules. I think it's important to catch up about that first before you move in."
(young adult)

"My last group home was pretty good. It was independent living, so they teach you if you're living on your stuff. I got to stay there for two years. They spoke to you once a week and asked how's your week? How's your day? They allowed contact with my family and stuff. They wouldn't treat you like a child."

"They (DoC) change their workers so many times. You get comfortable with a worker and then six months later they change, and they usually tell you literally a week before. Some tell you earlier but it's not common. Sometimes you get workers who don't even notice you. Workers need to stay for longer."

"We (my brother and I) are far apart and I never liked my foster family. I'm with my adopted mum now."

Young people who had transitioned from care held a common strong value of independence and privacy.

"Having my own house has been so good. Having been moved around so much. I've enjoyed having my own house. I don't have to clean if I don't want to."

"I don't like having people over unless it's my boyfriend."

"Like having my own place and don't have to move. I live close to my family as well now. I get to see them once or a few times a week. We go out for lunch or do normal family stuff, but I have my house to go back to."

Finally, young people shared their Moments of joy and optimism and about how carers and workers celebrate their achievements. Being proud of achievements – theirs and others – are special moments and so are enjoying hobbies, experiencing affirmation and time spent with family.

"Making creations in Minecraft. I made a huge mushroom with a house on it. I showed it to my brother, and he was proud of me." (child)

"No matter what I do my mum and dad are proud of me. I just need to be me." (child)

"Doing a backflip on a trampoline." (child)

"Beating everyone in laser tag!" (child)

"I felt excited when I kicked a goal during my footy training." (child)

"I was proud when I went fishing with my friend and we caught a crab." (child)

"I was proud of my brother when he played the drums at a concert."

"I was proud of myself last week at the ANZAC assembly when I spoke in front of the whole school when I did the Welcome to Country. The school office called and told my carer that I did well."

"I am proud, and my principal was proud, because I stopped skipping classes." (child)

"I'm super proud of how far I've come. I've been to a lot of houses, had a lot of bad experiences. ...It's always really good to celebrate the good times. When I turned 18 my DCP worker booked the leaving care party the day before my birthday. At the event [they] called out that I was 18 and had my own place." (young adult)

"I had so many people say I wouldn't be able to do this or that. I'm doing most those things. Living on my own and driving. Studying as well" (young adult)

"For me, I've got four different jobs. I just want to do them all well."

"Having people congratulate me on how far I've come and seeing how well I've done for myself is good." (young adult)

"When I got my driver's license, I was really happy but not as happy as my youth worker" (young adult)

"When I was younger, when I went through the group homes, I only got to see my mum for a few hours a fortnight. I think it was mum constantly asking for contact. I was always looking forward to that fortnight." (young adult)

Young people and young adult participants also reflected that they have had *moments* in care that have been deeply painful.

"They gave me books every year for my birthday. The Department, never read them. Stuck them on the shelf and never looked again." (young adult)

"I was 3 when they took me to my foster mum. My Nanna would take me to see my mum every weekend. I'd get bribed by my foster mum to try get me in the car away from my birth mum." (young adult)

"Workers would say, 'We'll look into it', if I asked to have more contact with my mum, but they never did." (young adult)

"I'd get comfortable living in a group home and then they'd move me. I wouldn't even get a choice in it." (young adult)

Regional Experiences of the Out-Of-Home Care (OOHC) System

On the 27th June 2025 CREATE staff and members gathered in Geraldton for a Youth Advisory Group to consider current experiences of the out-of-home care system in regional Western Australia. The young people's conversation focused on the importance of family connections and their desire for the system to operate in ways that better support families and family connection.

"When I was 5 or 6, I'd stay at my Nan's. She had a really old house. When I stayed at the house once, I was standing on the balcony trying to pass something to my aunty. The balcony broke and I fell out the window and the wind was fully knocked out of me. The court report that was written by DCP as if it was my family's fault, and that they were negligent. No one was responsible for that; it was an accident. DCP demonised the whole thing."

"I was going to go home to visit my family in NSW. I was outlining my plan of visiting my siblings, my uncle, and my friend. As soon as I mentioned my friend, DCP pushed it all away. I still haven't seen my family. I shouldn't have ever mentioned my friend. They look for any reason to say no."

"I was supposed to be out of care, but mum went into jail. That has prolonged everything. I will probably now be in care until I'm 18 now, even though I am with a stable family friend."

Young people also spoke of the unmet needs they often experience in the regions and what is needed.

"More positive action."

"Meeting more basic needs."

"Groceries for carers who might not be able to pay."

"Send out vouchers for kids who are old enough to understand how to use them. Vouchers are given to carers, but they aren't always spent on the kids."



South Australia

Lived experience insights from children and young people with care experience, 2024-2025

Between July 2024 and June 2025 there were 11 Youth Advisory Groups held in South Australia.

108 young people attended these sessions to share their insights and lived experiences.

Are you listening?



South Australia

Who we heard from

Between July and December 2024, CREATE Foundation facilitated 11 Youth Advisory Group sessions in South Australia, most were held in Adelaide's metro areas, and a number across the state including the regional South-East, Mid-North and the Eyre Peninsula, in the state's regional west. 108 young people attended these sessions to share their insights and experiences.

Key themes and insights

During the Youth Advisory Groups, young people shared their insights and experiences of:

- Story telling for cultural connection
- Transitions from care to independence
- Sibling connections
- Self-care practices and mental health
- Rural experiences of living in out-of-home care (OOHC)
- Wellbeing and health in South Australia's regional mid-north
- Girls' wellbeing and self-care
- Sibling connection in South Australia's regional west
- Cultural connection to Community in South Australia's regional west
- Health and Wellbeing in metropolitan Adelaide
- Young people's voices on South Australia's Youth Treatment Order review

Storytelling for cultural connection

“Dreamtime keeps our culture alive.”

Aboriginal young people worked with an Aboriginal artist with lived experience of OOHC to yarn about the importance of story and culture. Guided by the artist, the young people designed and painted a mural commissioned by a local city council, telling the story of place. The young people spoke about their experience of disruption to community, connection, culture and Country as a result of being removed into care. A young person shared that their mob lives interstate and they have not visited Country since being in care because, they are told, it is too expensive. They yearn to visit their Country one day. The young people spoke about storytelling as:

“Keeping our story alive.”

“Passing down knowledge.”

“Passing down a culture and way of living.”

“Identity.”

“Art can tell a story of where you have been in the past.”

The young people shared that they enjoy art creation in their residential homes. They spoke about their carers encouraging them to create art and providing the materials they need.

Transitions from care to independence

Times of change are always times of mixed feelings. Young people spoke about feeling scared, confused and frightened. Some spoke of loneliness and grief during their transition from care, while others spoke about feeling confident and looking forward to independence.

“I am going to rock it and it’s going to be as chill as. I’ve got it pretty planned out.”

“It’s a very emotional and frightening thing to do, especially at a young age.”

“Most kids your age are 18 and still with their parents... I felt quite alone.”

They shared insights into what is important for a young person’s successful transition, including:

- transition is well planned and preparation starts early, at 15 years-of-age
- ongoing medical support for management of health issues
- understanding the “rules” about who they are “allowed” to live with when they transition
- having access to housing and help to organise housing
- workshops on budgeting, housing, managing a house, and being “employment-ready” including resume writing
- having support to get “enough hours” to qualify for a provisional (P) driver’s license
- caseworker support when deciding on the type of living arrangements that will best suit them.

“Being brought up in a family from 18 months of age [then at] 18, the system telling you that’s not your family. That’s a huge thing to take on.”

Sibling connections

“If you’ve got a sibling that you’ve never met, never talked to, you’ve subconsciously got a piece of you missing.”

Young people continue to tell us how important connection to their siblings is. They also tell us about the system and practice changes they want. This is what they tell us they want:

- to know their siblings
- for their social workers to encourage connection with their siblings and for them to want to know their siblings as a part of knowing and caring for them
- more say in arrangements to see their siblings and less adult control
- less administrative checks for access to family
- greater flexibility in timing sibling time together, so siblings are available to get together
- responsiveness to a child or young person’s request for regular contact with siblings
- responsiveness to how the child or young person wants to engage with siblings and family, including the involvement of their social worker
- at 16 years-of-age, greater agency in when and where they spend time with their siblings.

“It was just kind of ‘Oh you’ve gone to this sibling’s house too many times... you need to have break.’ Imagine telling someone they need to have a break from seeing their family!”

Young people told us these changes are important because:

“As you learn more about your siblings and your family, you then start finding out more things about yourself.”

Young people also told us:

- sibling connection is about identity
- sibling contact is important to your wellbeing
- identity and wellbeing are important for strong mental health.
-

“They (siblings) didn’t know they were helping my mental health but just being around them could cheer me up even if they were annoying me. Just knowing they were with me.”

Self-care practices and mental health care

Three CREATE Youth Advisory Groups in the second half of 2024 focused on wellbeing, self-care and mental health. The young people shared that re-traumatisation while in care, experiences of racism and stigma all impact negatively on their mental health.

Young people told us that racism and stigma **look** like:

- being judged on appearance
- navigating being in care and having system involvement in your life
- not having parents in your life
- segregation
- invisibility;

"It's hard when everyone's looking at you and you're not allowed to fail and you have to be strong...you're the face of resilience...I feel so weak at times".

Young people told us that racism and stigma **sound** like:

- telling your story over and over again to new people
- a dialogue of deficit and difference
- judgement, pity and undermining
- internal criticism and judgement – "what's wrong with me?"
- self-doubt and questioning your place in the world and self-worth
- not telling your truth to keep yourself and others safe
- silence – being silenced.

"...having to trauma dump... it weighs on you quite heavily because of the negative associations."

Young people told us that racism and stigma **feel** like:

- shame
- being pitied
- loneliness
- re-traumatisation
- a weight of responsibility to disprove assumptions of failure
- guilt for telling your story because it casts your parents badly
- being unlovable.

"I never felt worthy of self-care growing up. I'm only just learning it's okay to love myself."

Young people told us the barriers they face to self-care, wellbeing and mental health are:

- stigmatisation
- racism
- navigating the child protection system
- a lack of security in relation to having basic needs met when you leave care
- people-pleasing behaviours and difficulty setting boundaries
- lack of guidance in recognising and prioritising personal needs during childhood.

The wisdom they shared

At CREATE's final Youth Advisory Group for 2024, young people met in a garden and learned to pot plants, while talking about caring for themselves. This is some of the wisdom they shared.

"Self-care is a human right, not a luxury."

"I used to think self-care was bubble baths and shopping. Now I see it's about saying no and looking after myself."

"I had to try to change the dialogue for myself and say that, 'It's OK that this happened and it doesn't define who you are. It just adds to who you are.'"

"Plants bounce back if you nurture them, and so can we."

"I realised how much I neglect myself when I saw how quickly a plant suffers if it doesn't get what it needs."

"Resting used to feel like laziness, but now I know it's part of what keeps me strong."

"Heavy metal music is my version of mindfulness—it's what grounds me."

"Taking care of myself doesn't just help me—it helps me be there for the people I love."

Rural experience of living in care

"What's the point of going anywhere when there is no place to go?"

"I had a fractured foot and it took six hours to be seen."

In October 2024, CREATE SA team visited the state's South East and held a Youth Advisory Group with 13 young people living in OOH in the regions. They shared the unique challenges they face living regionally.

- a lack of Aboriginal-led services
- staff shortages, and the quality and capacity of residential staff
- limited social activity options for young people and the options available are too expensive
- public transport is limited, particularly on the weekends

the cost of living is higher than in metro areas

- housing availability is very limited, so there are long wait times

- the regional hospital is stretched to capacity so there are long wait times in the Emergency Department
- options for study, courses and employment are limited
- the limited support to accrue necessary driving hours to progress to 'P' (provisional) license has bigger consequences when you live regionally.

The changes young people living regionally in OOHC seek include:

- different allocation of funding towards resources identified by young people as needed most, including housing for young people transitioning to independent living
- better support when leaving care, targeted for young people living regionally
- better support from schools and better support of schools by the Department for Education in training staff to understand the experiences of children and young people who live in OOHC and how best to engage with them
- community attitude campaign to address racism
- better communication between carers and caseworkers
- CREATE training mandatory for new workers in child protection
- CREATE to come more often for engagement and connection events.

"[The] cost of living has gone up and so has purchasing a car."

"Only help with 10 driving lessons from the Department but we need more support."

"My brother lives in resi care and I have noticed he hasn't had a haircut in a long time."

Wellbeing and health: young people's voices from South Australia's mid-north

On Monday, 20 January 2025, 12 young people of South Australia's mid-north region, aged between 11 and 21 years-of-age, gathered in Port Augusta, on the Country of the Barngarla and Nukunu peoples. They came together to discuss how they care for their wellbeing; the opportunities available to them in their communities to care for their wellbeing, and their experiences of access to health services in the region.

Wellbeing activities are 'like a box of chocolates' – everyone has a favourite!

Young people shared their personal favourites:

"Heavy metal music is my version of mindfulness—it's what grounds me."

"I listen to music."

"read and write stories."

"cooking."

"playing sport", "netball", "gymnastics", "softball", "basketball", "hockey."

"online gaming. I build friendships online."

"I like to draw."

"I watch my comfort shows."

"I eat vegetables."

"Learning cultural language, that makes me feel good. You have to learn your cultural language. Yeah, very good [for wellbeing]."

"What is good for my wellbeing? Family catch up."

What works against young people's wellbeing

While how young people care for their wellbeing is individual, what works against their wellbeing is common between one another and with young people in the metropolitan area.

"[I] want more family access. I want to see my nephew more".

"Worries about new kids coming into your [resi] house that you don't get a chance to meet them beforehand. To be introduced."

"Random people [workers] that I do not know, entering my care house. Yes, I get worried about that."

"I didn't feel like I could trust anyone. Every time I built a relationship with a worker, they would just leave."

"Having to tell your story over and over again makes you want to give up."

The young people also spoke about the factors that work against young people's wellbeing unique to living regionally. These included a lack of public and private transportation; the expense of activities, particularly given the costs of living. One young person voiced when talking about recreation:

"What's the point of going anywhere when there is no place to go?"

Young people of the regional north voiced experiences of a lack of choice and control in regard to their health care, and the resulting impediments to their health and wellbeing.

"When I needed a doctor, they [workers] made me fight for it. But when they wanted me to go, I had no choice."

"I needed a counsellor, but my carer thought it was a waste of time."

"I was scared to ask for help because I thought it would cost money I didn't have."

Young people also voiced experiences to health care access that is unique to living regionally. They identified there is a shortage of doctors, dentists, other specialists and mental health services and the regional hospitals are stretched to capacity.

"Not enough services. Not enough doctors".

"There are not many physical doctors available to see."

"Doctors are booked out."

"There are long wait times in the Emergency Department."

"I had a fractured foot, and it took six hours to be seen."

"My carer pushed for me to see an orthodontist."

"I don't personally like Headspace. Most of the people who I had weren't great, and they didn't bring in the best people... just not very supportive."

One young person reflected that if they had had earlier access to mental health support and dental services it would have *"prevented things getting worse in the future."*

Girls' Wellbeing and self-care

At the request of a group of young women for an opportunity to come together, in a safe and inclusive space, to talk about issues related to wellbeing, self-care and health issues specific to young women, a Girls' Wellbeing and Self-care Youth Advisory Group, was held on Kaurua Land, in Adelaide's city centre, on 13 February 2025. Attracting 12 participants, aged between 14-25, the conversation identified challenges faced by young women with out-of-home care experience to achieve optimal wellbeing and health, and recommendations for service improvement for young women in care and post-care.

Participants spoke at length about the importance of personal presentation and its connection to their wellbeing and self-esteem. They shared their enjoyment in taking care of their appearance but identified there is stigma in the community attached to being a young person-in-care associated with young people's looks: *"There is an OOHC look, you know", "like poverty"*. People assume to *"know what we are like"* based on appearance. Despite this, the young people were enthusiastic about presenting themselves with confidence. They shared:

"Makeup helps me feel like I have control over how I present myself."

"Putting on mascara and a bit of blush makes me feel put together even when I'm not."

"Having a simple makeup routine makes me feel confident."

"I wish I had someone to teach me how to take care of my skin and do my makeup properly."

"Even if I don't wear makeup, just doing my hair makes me feel better."

The place of social media in relation to their personal appearance and to their wellbeing and mental health was discussed. They described social media being both detrimental to their sense of self, and so their wellbeing, but also a tool of empowerment.

"Seeing perfect bodies online messes with my self-esteem."

"I learned more about mental health from TikTok than from any carer or worker."

"[Social media]'s good for finding people who understand you, but it also makes you compare yourself to others too much."

"Social media gives me a voice to share my experience, but it also makes me feel exposed."

Sexual and reproductive health and bodily autonomy

"I didn't know where to go when I had issues with my period."

The participants spoke about needing more open conversations with carers and case workers about reproductive health and safe sexual activity. They spoke about a neglect of support when menstruation begins, which leads to confusion, fear and period poverty.

"I was too scared to ask for period products because I didn't want to feel like a burden."

"When I turned 15, they stopped buying me pads and told me to use my Centrelink money."

"No one ever asked me if I needed to see a doctor (about period pain) until it was an emergency."

"In care or homes, the conversation (about sexual and reproductive health) is not spoken about enough, and if you move a lot, they assume you've already had the conversation."

They identified the need to have conversations that inform them about the qualities of healthy relationships, acknowledging they are vulnerable to making relationship choices that do not serve their wellbeing. Most expressed that these conversations were not available to them.

"No one really talked to me about what a healthy relationship looks like."

"I thought toxic relationships were normal because that's all I saw growing up."

"Healthy relationships should feel safe and equal, but that's not something I ever saw in care."

Conversation about bodily autonomy centred around choice and control over matters of sexual health and reproductive rights. Of great concern was their experience of having no control and no choice. The participants identified that being informed is important grounding for understanding issues, the services available and the choices available to them. Many spoke of experiences contrary to this.

"I didn't even know STI testing was a thing until my friend told me about it."

"Girls in care should have access to female health workers who actually understand our needs."

"We need more health check-ups and information about women's health should be provided, not just when something goes wrong."

Young women who live in residential care homes shared that it is standard practice for them to *"be put on"* contraception without discussion or choice, either when menstruation or sexually activity begins.

"I was forced onto contraception without being given all the options."

"We need more services that actually help young women understand their rights."

"It is important to have a conversation with girls in care about safe sex."

The participants shared the lack of choice and control extends when a young person becomes pregnant.

"I have heard girls not being asked what they want when it comes to being pregnant. Abortion is the only option."

"It is important to have the conversation with girls in care about safe sex and abortion - that isn't the only option. There are ways to look after the child if you want to."

The young women shared that stigmatisation was a primary reason for being denied choice and control. Department for Child Protection workers and medical professionals assume that because a young woman's biological parents harmed, neglected and/or abuse them then *"we will do that too"*, and that because of their background of trauma they will not have the capacity to be parents.

Young women's health after leaving care

A final discussion was about the difficulties young women face in caring for their wellbeing and health when they have transition from care. Participants reported being under prepared and under resourced to access health care. Again, in their own words:

"I had no idea how to book my own GP appointments when I turned 18."

"No one told me how to access birth control after leaving care."

"Women's health check-ups should be part of our transition planning."

"We need free and accessible healthcare for young women leaving care."

"I was scared to ask for help because I thought it would cost money I didn't have."

Sibling Connection and Cultural Connection to Community: young people's voices from South Australia's regional west

"The decision sits with DCP about whether I see my siblings or not."

"We shouldn't have to get permission to see siblings."

"Sometimes we have to organise our own catch ups."

Across the 15th and 16th April, a group of young people came together in Port Lincoln, on traditional Barngarla Country, to discuss the issues that are important to them.

On the 15th April, with the young people's permission, the Honourable Katrine Hilyard, Minister for Child Protection, and the Department for Child Protection's Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Carer Supports joined the young people during the second half of their Youth Advisory Group. The Youth Advisory Group's first half saw participants decide which issue they wanted to speak to the Minister about and communicate directly the changes they seek. Attended by sibling groups who had not seen each other for almost a year, matters of sibling connection became the issue the young people wanted to address with the Minister. The young people spoke openly with the Minister about:

- the challenges they face that make sibling time difficult;
- the challenges faced by case workers to prioritise sibling connections;
- the Department for Child Protection processes that create barriers to siblings spending time together;

- the distress felt when they have no relationship with their siblings and the distress and concern for siblings who remain in situations of harm.

"I don't know what my family looks like. I was taken out of home at 14 months old and I'm now turning 11 soon. I want to see them, but DCP can't find them."

"I asked DCP to help me visit my family but I don't have a worker."

The following day, Centacare Country's resident artist and worker, local First Nations woman, Jayla, created a welcoming space for the young people and led conversations, through storytelling and rock painting, about Cultural, Country and community connection. The young people discussed the ways they feel connected to culture, including through cultural events, connecting with local Elders, and having conversations at school. Jayla spoke about the meaning and cultural importance of storytelling for First Nations people, and how storytelling differs across mobs. She guided the young people to tell their own stories through painting. Painting their stories was a reflective activity; their painted rocks expressed feelings and emotions about connection and belonging.

"Community is when Mobs get together and talk about family and culture. Teaching kids' language and storytelling."

Better Start kick off: Health and Wellbeing

In April, CREATE kicked off its consultation partnership with the University of Adelaide's Better Start project, exploring the question 'Are health systems meeting the health needs of the 50,000 Australian children in out-of-home care?' The Better Start research wants to elevate children and young people's voice in health policy and practice. This is a real opportunity for CREATE Young Consultants to contribute to systemic change. 9 young people gathered, on Kurna land, to begin considering the question. The group started where it would like the research to finish, by imagining an ideal health system that meets the needs of young people who have experience of out-of-home-care. Here are some of the young people's 'Blue Sky' ideas for a health care system best for them:

"Healthcare needs to be about the whole person, not just fixing problems."

"It should feel like you are part of the team helping yourself, not like you're the problem."

"Young people should help design services, not just be asked for feedback after."

"It would help if there was one main worker you could trust and not have to keep starting again."

"Support should start earlier, not just when things are really bad."

"We need spaces that feel welcoming, not clinical and cold."

"Professionals should be trained by care-experienced people so they actually understand."

"There should be easy ways to get mental health support without jumping through a million hoops."

Reviewing South Australia's Youth Treatment Order Scheme

"There's this idea that it's just what young people do. But no one asks why."

"Being involved with police just reinforces that you're a problem, not a person."

"Youth are not the issue. We are expected to break cycles, be flexible, be all and nothing at the same time."

"You can't force someone to heal."

On 3rd June, a Youth Advisory Panel (YAP) was held, in collaboration with the Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People, to gather care-experienced young people's views on the South Australian Youth Treatment Order (YTO) scheme. The intent was for their views to be recorded and heard by the South Australian Government's *Review of Youth Treatment Orders*. The scheme at present provides mechanisms for mandatory, court-ordered assessment and treatment for young people who are detained at the Adelaide Youth Training Centre and determined to be drug dependent and causing harm to self/others. Phase Two of the scheme, the implementation of which is a part of the review, would allow for an extension of the scheme to children and young people outside of detention. The outcome of the review is of particular concern for young people with out-of-home-care experience because of their over-representation in youth detention, and further because of the over-representation of Aboriginal young people in detention, as well as their over-representation in out-of-home-care.

17 young people, aged 14 to 25 years old, with lived experience, from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds, genders, and locations across Kurna Country-the Adelaide Plains-participated in the important conversation. They spoke about their experience of drug and alcohol use by themselves and others, the intersection of trauma, care experiences and substance use, the supports or systems that impact their safety in relation to drug and alcohol used, and how policy responses can affect them. They concluded that mandatory treatment - especially court-imposed - fails to reflect their needs or support their healing. Their insights included:

- exposure to substances can start at a young age in family and community settings. What is needed is community-wide education and protective interventions.
- contact with police and the justice system escalates risk rather than reduces it.
- criminalisation compounds trauma and limits options, rather than providing meaningful help.
- autonomy and trust are important. Treatment should be offered, not imposed. Incentives could promote voluntary participation.
- trust, relatability and respect are key. Young people need at least one person they can genuinely connect with. Check-ins from friends, support from caring adults, and access to positive role models can prevent escalation and encourage healthier pathways.

Northern Territory

Lived experience insights from children and young people with care experience, 2024-2025

Between July 2024 and June 2025 there were 11 Youth Advisory Groups held in Northern Territory.

95 young people attended these sessions to share their insights and lived experiences.

Are you listening?



Northern Territory

Who we heard from

Between July 2024 and June 2025, CREATE Foundation facilitated 11 Youth Advisory Group sessions across Northern Territory. 95 young people attended these sessions to share their insights and experiences.

Key themes and insights

During the Youth Advisory Groups, young people shared their experiences and their insights into:

- Connection to Culture
- Losing Time and Opportunity in Care
- Transition to Independence – After Care Support
- World Care Day - “Celebrating Every Journey”
- International Women’s Day: Empowering and honouring women
- Youth Homelessness Day

Connection to Culture

Connection to culture is an ongoing concern for children and young people and is raised in all the Youth Advisory Groups that CREATE convenes in the Northern Territory (NT). For First Nations children and young people, connection to culture is critical to quality care. Young people told us:

"Not being able to speak my language, Yolngu Matha. I don't understand when my family are talking."

"I feel disconnected from my people and my Country. I feel a lot of shame and hurt."

"Culture is important, because without it I wouldn't be me, my culture is important but I wish I had the chance to understand it more growing up in care."

"I feel too white for my family and too black to everyone else. I shouldn't feel shame and wouldn't if I had stayed connected to my culture. That's important"

"We met some old people from Stolen Generation and one old lady knew my family and where we are from. She was telling me more than any of my caseworkers did when I was in care."

"I want to help other kids that have been in care reconnect to their family, country, and culture."

"I'm not really sure where my family is from. I don't even know what my dad looks like. I can't ask my mum 'cause it might cause problems."

Losing time and opportunity in care

As a very special Youth Advisory Group, young people were supported to develop a short song, "We Want More," which soulfully expresses some of the concerns CYP have about their experiences in care. Listen to the recording and read the lyrics below:

Wake up and I'm feelin' alright

I got Kiara, Selenia and Paula by my side!

I gotta say positive, I gotta stay strong!

Thinking of my mum and dad

I put you in this song!

All I really need is someone to believe in me

Give us a chance to succeed and do it easily

I want my brothers and sisters with me living peacefully

I need space, everyone want a piece of me

Space, sick of always feeling in the rain

Why does it feel like honesty is always pain

*And they say honestly can always set you free
But in my situation, why is it different for me?*

*If I had more time I would sleep all night
Play with my friends with no end on site
If I had more time I'd be with my mates going out with CREATE
Going to the next day*

*Too much to do, got things on my plate
I need me time, gotta get things straight
I hear your texts
I hear your call
It's half of me as well tryin to balance it all*

*You gotta crawl before you get to your feel
But I've been workin for some time I'm ready to eat
I've been around enough to know what it's like on the street
You don't understand me or the placed I've been*

Chorus

*(We want more)
(More) time in the day that we're chasin'
(We want more)
More space for more regulation
(We want more)
Even if we fake it till' we make it
(We want more)
It's ok to have a voice and say it*

Transition to Independence: After Care Support

The transition from care to independence is widely known as a crucial and high-risk period for young people with care experience; they deserve the same opportunity to thrive in their adulthood as any of their peers. Yet too often, young people leaving care had little support to prepare them for navigating adulthood, such as housing, finding work, and managing money.

When asked whether their case manager had conversations around their leaving care plan when they turned 15, young people answered:

"No."

"No, not until I was 16, maybe 17."

"Yes, well technically they did but nothing ever got done and it took forever, sometimes I felt like I was included which pissed me off."

Young people shared their frustration about not feeling part of the leaving care planning process, describing it as lengthy and drawn out. They explained that delays in caseworkers completing plans often left them less prepared for leaving care and entering adulthood.

"I changed a hell of a lot out of my leaving care plan, only because what I previously said to them never got taken on board so I made sure what was said from me was up and running, so it was easier for me."

"It was mainly just funding because, they said "we'll help you get a house" but, how am I meant to buy furniture and stuff? I only recently got a job so it's now up to them."

"It was hard for me, because when I left care I was living in Tasmania, so I had to do phone appointments, that made it really hard to get anything done"

"I was kind of lucky because I had after care supports, it's just annoying when their case loads are so high, things take a really long time to process and it stresses me out because I have just left care and I really need the support and the Department aren't the best either"

Little information was given to the young people about who they could reach out to when needing support for transitioning from care (or after-care supports). Some of them responded, *"No idea,"* or, *"Not really, sometimes I ask CREATE for help."*

Other young people responded:

"It was hard for me, because when I left care I was living in Tasmania, so I had to do phone appointments, that made it really hard to get anything done."

"When I left Darwin, I was only in year 10, so I was still young."

In light of the conversation around this topic, the young people highlighted the following areas where they hope the service could be improved to better support them when leaving care:

- Begin developing a Leaving Care Plan from age 15 to ensure a well-prepared transition to independence.
- Actively involve young people in the planning process, ensuring their voice, goals, and aspirations are central. Plans should reflect their preferences, and young people must have genuine choice in decision-making.
- Address internal challenges such as high staff turnover and long caseworker waiting times, which often leave young people facing delays in having their plans completed.
- Provide access to safe, secure housing options, including practical assistance with organising and maintaining accommodation.
- Offer clear, accessible information about how to connect with available supports and services.

World Care Day—Celebrating Every Journey

“We are just like you, except we just grew up differently.

Maybe we might feel more comfortable with what we went through,

if people didn’t make judgments so quickly.”

World Care Day is about celebrating the successes and achievements of children and young people with a care experience. This year’s theme, ‘Celebrating Every Journey’, recognises the unique paths each young person may take and honours their achievements, strengths, and stories. Young people also shared their reflections on what the theme meant to them personally, as well as their hopes for breaking down the stigma surrounding care experience.

“Celebrating everyone as one”

“We are family”

“Celebrating the paths we have all walked”

The discussion session provided young people with time and space to reflect on their journey—how it has shaped their strength and resilience and how they plan to move forward from their past experiences. They also warmly shared aspects of their care journey that they are most proud of:

“I am proud of how far I have come because I have a lot to look forward to in my future.”

“I have learnt to advocate for myself and my friends; we help each other because we both left care at the same time and faced the same problems.”

Having a unique care experience has transformed the way young people see themselves, shaping both their dreams and future goals. One young person reflected on how being in care shaped their future differently and how it often felt like a solitary journey:

"It has shaped my future a lot. I have to go out and do things if I want it, because I don't have anyone else who will lift me up if I am down."

While a care experience can build strength and resilience, it also takes an emotional toll and shapes how young people see their lives and their futures. This reinforces how much more needs to be done to improve both the well-being of young people and the care system itself.

Young people shared their desire to be better understood and expressed hope for an end to the negative stigma surrounding care. When asked, *'What would you like the world to understand about young people growing up in care?'* they reflected deeply on this wish.

"We aren't 'fosters'; we actually have feelings and we can achieve anything if we put our mind to it."

"We deserve to be happy too"

"We've been through a lot and have a lot to offer"

International Women's Day: Empowering and Honouring Women and Girls

In March, CREATE NT received a grant from the Northern Territory Government Office of Youth Affairs in honour of International Women's Day (IWD). This funding enabled us to deliver tailored programs across the Territory, providing young people with meaningful opportunities to celebrate IWD. During these Youth Advisory Group sessions, young people engaged in thoughtful conversations about the women who have shaped their lives, including Carers, Elders, family members, and mentors. The activities created a safe and empowering space for reflection on the importance of strong female role models and for recognising the contributions of women within their communities. Children and young people also shared as girls and young women why they believe International Women's Day should be honoured:

"It's good to see what other good things females are doing. Gives us something to look up too."

"Lets us younger mob know we can do anything we want when we get older."

"Cause you can't be what you don't see. There's probably girls doing stuff but you don't really see it as much as what the boys are doing."

In conversations about health and well-being, young people shared the activities and practices they enjoy to stay strong—mentally, physically, and emotionally:

"I like to write in my journal or play with my dog." – Child

"Doing art, dancing, going for walks"

Young people also shared words of encouragement for young girls who are going through care, drawing from their own experiences. Their guidance provided reassurance that they should not feel isolated and highlighted ways to seek positive connections along the way.

"Don't be afraid to ask for help or let others know how you're feeling so they can help you."

"I reckon they should come along to CREATE like us cause it's fun with everyone doing stuff."

As part of the IWD celebration, young people joined CREATE staff for a fun, high-energy go-karting session that fostered connection and created positive memories. Young people had a positive experience and felt that the activity had boosted their confidence;

"Today was good cause I have never done go-karting before. I was really scared at the start, but then I got real confident. When I do start driving on the roads, I know I won't be as scared now."

Youth Homelessness

Each year, CREATE NT partners with community stakeholders to raise awareness of youth homelessness through direct engagement with young people. A key activity in April, Couch Surfing, reflects the reality faced by many young people who sleep rough and often rely on friends' or extended networks' couches for shelter. In the lead-up to the event, young people design a couch which they then race against other participants and organisations, carrying the simple but powerful message: *'This isn't a bed, this is a couch for couch surfing.'* The activity helps break down the stigma faced by young people experiencing homelessness while giving them direct access to support services, information, and service providers. Although this Youth Advisory Group session differs from the usual format, it offers a valuable opportunity for young people to discuss youth homelessness and its impact on their well-being. Participants also shared how sleeping on the streets affects their mental health and overall well-being.

"For me, it was the unknown of when I could afford to eat, let alone think of somewhere to sleep."

"I mainly slept on mates' couches; they kinda took me in like family but I still struggle."

Young people transitioning from out-of-home care face a higher risk of homelessness due to factors such as limited access to safe and secure housing, unemployment, disconnection from culture, and traumatic experiences. Given the profound negative impacts on their health, mental health, and overall well-being, young people with care experience urgently need support from government and services when at risk of homelessness. Young people also highlighted the urgency for more responsive services and caseworkers, as timely support is often crucial for those leaving care and transitioning to independence.

"They need people that aren't going to make false promises and give hope."

"Anglicare moving on program really helped me get the stuff I needed in my new house, but it takes a while to hear back all the time."

“More services we can tap into, because I don’t know about you, but when I left care I really struggled because nothing was put in place to help me if I became homeless, which I almost did. There was such a lack of services that could actually help me, and the ones that did help me, well they took forever and that’s how I almost ended up homeless.”

Young people also called on leaders and decision-makers to provide stronger support for young people without safe and secure housing. They emphasised that they should never be placed in unsafe accommodation and expressed a clear desire to always be included in decisions—particularly those that directly affect their futures.

Young women identified their concerns about safety of the accommodation available:

“Stop putting us in unsafe housing!”

“More safe housing”

The types and suitability of housing available was also raised:

“Young people who have been in care shouldn’t be made to live in public housing because the stuff I have witnessed is not good and it’s what I see every day”

“Include us in your decisions. Don’t assume we want to live there because it suits your workload.”

It is not only the Government and services that play a crucial role in supporting young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness—the community also has an important part to play. Young people expressed their desire to see changes in their communities that would better support those in care, both in preventing homelessness and in providing support when they have to face it.

“More things done before we leave care; this shouldn’t happen, but it’s happening all the time.”

Finally, young people shared words of wisdom for their peers at risk of homelessness: to speak up and reach out to services and networks for support when needed.

“Just don’t be afraid to speak up because the moment you do, you will find services to help you. I realised when I started asking for help was when I started getting support.”

“Reach out to CREATE or someone who can help you.”

Queensland

Lived experience insights from children and young people with care experience, 2024-2025

Between July 2024 and June 2025 there were 23 Youth Advisory Groups held throughout Queensland.

118 young people attended these sessions to share their insights and lived experiences.

Are you listening?



Queensland

Who we heard from

Between July 2024 and June 2025, CREATE Foundation facilitated 23 Youth Advisory Group sessions across Queensland, in and around the Brisbane and Cairns area. 118 young people attended these sessions to share their insights and experiences.

Key themes and insights

During the Youth Advisory Groups, young people shared their experiences and their insights into:

- Diversity and Inclusion
- Experiences of different types of care
- Transitioning from Care (two groups focused on this during the year)
- Choice and control
- Case worker support
- Connection to culture and family
- Health and Wellbeing
- Feedback about CREATE Foundation and Youth Advisory Group planning for the year ahead

Diversity and Inclusion

Gender diverse children and young people said they don't feel heard, affirmed and safe in care settings. Young people also said there is a need to use gender affirming language, and for carers and other adults to be friendly and approachable and to build trust and rapport.

"I felt judgement from child safety and family"

"What's safest is saying hey I know this is a tricky subject (identity) but what do you go by at the moment is it ok for me to call you by this name or should I call you by another name."

Experiences of different types of care

Children and young people told us they worry about their private information being shared without their knowledge. They feel transparency is important for safe information sharing.

"...my CSO emailed a bunch of my teachers about issues I was dealing with...it felt like an overreach."

"...my CSO made a lot of decisions without asking me."

CYP also described experiences of stigma as a result of living in residential care.

"They think you have no parents, nobody loves you, you're an orphan."

"People assume that foster kids are associated with crime, drugs, violence."

CYP expressed the view the general community need more awareness of what it's like to be in care.

"It's important to show the positives about foster care as well. It's not all clouds and stormy days. There are sunshine and rainbows."

"We need more successful foster kids in the media showing what they have achieved with their lives."

"Educate the teachers and professionals. A lot don't have the knowledge about foster care or handling people with that trauma."

CYP felt they didn't get to have a say about their care arrangements.

"They did not take me seriously. It got to the point where I had to nearly take my life before they took me seriously..."

Kinship care was young people's preferred type of placement, but CYP had mixed feelings.

"When you're in kinship with your family, child safety doesn't prioritise signing your paperwork because you're with family."

"Foster care (is better) because it's more welcoming. It's like being with a family. It imitates being with a family rather than just with other kids."

"...moving into a new house is very daunting and it's hard because you know it's not your family and you don't know how long you're going to be there for."

To improve residential care children and young people asked for more stability in placements, more consistent staffing, better background checks, better training for staff, better communication by staff and more individualised approaches to care.

"It would be good to be spoken to you when you first move in so you know how it works and know what to do and know right from wrong."

Transitioning from Care

Some young people told us they are looking forward to transitioning, taking control over their lives and making their own decisions.

"I feel like I'm already an adult."

"I can't wait to transition."

Young people who have already transitioned to independence reflected on the challenges of transitioning.

"It was lonely."

"It was hard to find support. Even if you already had workers in place, they don't always do their job properly."

"I transitioned into a homeless shelter because there were no proper housing options..."

"It's a reminder that we didn't have a proper childhood. You couldn't be a teenager and do teenage things. You had to focus on planning your adulthood because nobody else was going to do it."

"The actual transition went fairly smoothly, but afterwards was quite rough ... the worker wasn't very good. I would ask for advice and they would print out wiki articles on what to do. I eventually just stopped talking to them."

Young people talked about the need for greater support with the cost of living and housing.

"I was given a brochure for a homeless shelter and told that there's five beds and if you're sixth in line then you're sleeping on the street."

"Secure housing is the main issue. How can you even think about getting a driving licence when you don't have an address to go to?"

"Your young people are under so much stress – just remember that it gets worse when they have to work out how to become an adult."

"...housing application has to be done when you're 16 so that there is time to find a place. They should make it a priority to get it done..."

Choice and control

Young people growing up in residential care shared that they value opportunities to exercise choice within their daily lives including meals and activities and who they engage with.

"We have house meetings every Sunday. It's good cause we get to choose what's for dinner and what activities we can do, like fishing."

"I get to go shopping with the workers and choose my own food."

"My resi house would give me a movie voucher if the activity for the day was a film. I could choose to go with a friend. Having that choice was good."

Young people shared the barriers that sometimes exist in relation to having choice and control over their own life, including in the area of meaningful connection with family and friends. Young people acknowledged the importance of processes that safeguard young people and minimise risk, but asked that these be executed in collaborative and empowering ways which support young people's autonomy and decision-making skills, particularly as they move towards adulthood.

"It's good to encourage sleep overs with friends. Carers should ensure that they have the contact details of your friend's parents to ensure safe environments when you want to hang out with a friend, rather than restricting the young person's freedom. Visiting friends' houses also provides access to a 'home like environment'."

"If a young person comes home intoxicated, educate them rather than be punitive with consequences. It is important to find a balance between no independence and giving too much independence to young people."

Young people spoke about how they feel when their choices are not considered in the decisions that affect their lives.

"[You feel] annoyed, powerless, out of control, unsafe. The decision-making process should involve me."

Case worker support

Young people spoke about their experiences of frequent worker turnover and a lack of clarity around the role that different workers take in their lives.

"I have had maybe 3 or 4 CSO's in the last year."

"I haven't seen her [Community Visitor] for a while, maybe she has retired. I am not sure what they do or who they work for, Child Safety maybe?"

Young people also spoke to frustration with bureaucracy and a desire for their foster carers to have more autonomy over certain decisions affecting the young person's everyday life.

"Cut out the middle man. Just ring my carer to get forms signed."

Young people shared their thoughts on the skills and attributes that they believe case workers need to possess in order to support them effectively, with a focus on communication and engagement.

“Consistency and good communication are key skills that all CSO’s need to learn.”

“My favourite CSO would always ask about how I am and really talk to me and get to know me and not just talk about being in care.”

Young people shared helpful experiences of connecting with case workers through various non-government organisations and appreciated a range of safe adults who they can connect with and receive practical support from.

“I have a support worker at [a youth service in Cairns] that comes and helps me. They take me places and help me with appointments and stuff. They also take me to skate parks sometimes and that feels nice.”

Connection to culture and family

Young people shared that connection to culture and connection to family are central to healthy identity development and overall wellbeing. They identified a need for increased support to assist with connection to culture and family, such as through records and family tracing, mental health and disability support.

“I don’t feel like I have enough connection to culture because I don’t have enough contact with the side of my family that my culture comes from but also my anxiety and disability makes it hard for me to make connections. I do feel judged and I feel like I’m not aboriginal enough as I’m white passing.”

“I have a huge family. I don’t even know half of them. I’ve had a few miscommunications about my family history. When I was born I was taken straight from the hospital to a non-indigenous carer and I didn’t know who my parents were.”

Young people also spoke to the importance of having access to elders, community members and identified workers who can share positive aspects of culture where those connections are not able to be shared by family members.

“I had a negative association with indigenous culture because that side of my culture was abusive. So, when they asked if I wanted to be more connected I said “no” If I had more education and knew more and they told me what the culture is actually about I could have made an informed decision.”

“I wish child safety would’ve taken me to an elder to learn about everything. Then I would’ve engaged more in cultural events.”

“There needs to be more Aboriginal liaison officers coming into residential care homes. There needs to be better communication between child safety and their mob because right now the communication is nothing. They need for kids to feel connected to culture and actually feel safe to learn about their culture.”

One young person also highlighted broader systemic issues around the importance of Aboriginal ways of helping being incorporated into care systems more broadly.

"I also think that mental health care in out of home care and in general is way too Eurocentric. They need to integrate Aboriginal ways of helping with mental health and medicine."

Health and wellbeing

Young people shared that they want access to healthy, balanced meals when growing up in out of home care, which was of particular concern to young people with an experience of residential care.

"There's a food budget. It's usually just pies, spaghetti, crumbed chicken. There's not much protein except for meat. There aren't many veggies. I'm not expecting organic food, but balance would be good."

"There's so much bribery with workers telling the kids they'll buy them McDonald's if they behave. It sets up really bad habits and coping mechanisms."

Young people growing up in residential care also spoke about their concerns that they did not receive appropriate information and support around understanding puberty and sex education. Where young people did receive information, this often did not occur in a relational manner between the young person and a worker or carer.

"The night I got my period for the first time, there were two men on shift and they just laughed at me."

"It's so hard for the youth workers. If you start talking to young people about sex education you can overstep the boundary and get fired."

"My resi gave us a pack when I moved in – a book about the women's body. I can't read so it was pretty pointless. I just told them that I read it and they never checked if I knew anything."

Particular gaps were identified in relation to support and information for young people who identify as LGBTQIA+.

"A lot of queer people don't have access to sexual and reproductive health information and services. A lot of doctors will say, 'Oh I don't deal with this thing'. A lot of carers don't know how to support people who are just figuring out who they are."

Young people spoke to barriers that exist which prevent them from accessing adequate trauma-informed mental health support. They also highlighted that they often lack information about the supports and services available to them where these do exist.

"I got kicked out of [program] for being too high risk. There was nowhere else for me to go, so I just didn't get any treatment."

"I wish there was more info about NDIS as I didn't hear about NDIS until after I left care."

Young people shared their desire for greater education within mainstream mental health and medical fields about the needs of young people with a lived experience of growing up in out of home care. They emphasised that early intervention is crucial.

"Workers need extensive knowledge of out of home care and trauma – otherwise assumptions and labels can be made and applied."

“They need to start giving the little one’s therapy right away rather than waiting until they have all of these big behaviours they want to sort out.”

“I was not diagnosed with depression as soon as I could have been because I was male and they thought that I was just an angry young boy.”

Transitioning from care to adulthood

In another Youth Advisory Group, also focused on transition from care, young people shared some of the challenges inherent in the transition to adulthood journey which are unique to young people who grow up in out of home care, such as access to birth certificates and family information. This is particularly true for young people growing up in residential care who don’t have parental figures in their lives.

“There’s just so many things you need to do and so many barriers. For example, getting my passport was a whole barrier as you have to supply your parents’ birth certificate if you’re born after 1980 and it’s very hard to source if you’ve come from a care home.”

“I wish someone had told me it was going to be alright and that you’ll figure out how to do all the hard stuff, like tax and superannuation. I wish people had taught me some of that stuff instead of having to figure it out on my own.”

Young people also shared direct feedback on CREATE’s SORTLI App and its role in assisting their transition to adulthood. The opportunity to reflect on values and access to referral information were identified as helpful. However, young people felt that the referral information available could be extended and tailored to their region.

“I really like the ‘my values quiz’. I think it’s very easy to lose sight of who you are during an out of home care experience and it’s nice to have something small to explore that.”

“The app has general resources for Brisbane and north QLD but if you could put in your postcode and then it came up with your local resources or phone numbers for support, specifically in areas like housing, medical etc. ...would be really good.”

Feedback about The CREATE Foundation and Youth Advisory Group planning for the year ahead.

Young people provided their feedback on how they believe CREATE can most effectively promote events and activities. Themes emerged around preference for use of social media and emails. Some young people expressed the view that CREATE could streamline communication and registration forms.

“The best way to promote [CREATE Foundation programs] is through social media, Instagram, Tiktok and email. I don’t like having to fill the registration form out every time. There should be a box to tick if you have attended an event before so that you don’t have to do it every time.”

“I get way too many emails about activities and events. One email per month would be good.”

Some young people expressed that information contained within emails is not always clear. Suggestions were made to increase clarity, such as colour coding flyers to represent different types of CREATE events (connection, Youth Advisory Groups, and Speak Up programs) as well as different modes of delivery (online or face to face).

"I find out about CREATE through emails – information is not always clear."

"CREATE flyers look too similar. Colour code them so that we know the difference between online and face to face YAGs [Youth Advisory Groups]."

Young people also shared ideas about how CREATE could increase its reach and ensure that information reaches more young people with an experience of out of home care, including through government departments, other services and CREATE Young Consultants.

"Reach out to the Child Safety offices in the region where the activity is taking place."

"CREATE should email other service providers such as Next Step Plus to get new people involved in CREATE."

"CREATE should promote within schools and community."

"Seek support from young consultants to promote the activities amongst their networks."

Young people also commented on their preference for the format of Youth Advisory Groups, with young people preferring some degree of structure and CREATE facilitators actively facilitating discussions.

"CREATE should ask us question by question, with young people taking it in turns to respond."

"People go off topic too much when we have YAGs [Youth Advisory Groups] at the office [in person]."

When young people were asked what other types of activities and opportunities they would like to do more of, they raised ideas for outdoor connection events, increased paid advocacy opportunities and increasing access to the Speak Up program within the community.

"More activities like BBQ's at the beach or picnics"

"More paid opportunities like the consultations"

"More stuff at our school because there are other kids that could do the Speak Up program."

Young people living in regional areas provided additional feedback on their experiences and needs. Young people expressed that, ideally, they would have the opportunity to come together with other young people in person or at a minimum engage in online connection events, such as online Trivia or Uno.

"I live in [central QLD regional town] which is difficult to attend connection events –. It would be cool to have a camping trip with other Young Consultants".

Young people spoke to their experience of being a Young Consultant with CREATE and how support in this process would ideally occur. Young people desire a capacity building model that considers individual needs and tailors' opportunities accordingly. Young people also highlighted the importance of regularity of contact and engagement from CREATE.

"Ask young consultants at the completion of Speak Up training, and more regularly, what their strengths are, what they are interested in and what support they need to grow and develop into new opportunities over time. e.g. co-facilitation."

"Give young people who are shy the option to pre-record a response or make a video so that they still have the opportunity to share."

"Often there are lots of opportunities and then nothing for ages. Sometimes it feels like being ghosted. I think it is because there is new staff there all of the time."

When young people were asked to comment on their reasons for attending CREATE events, they shared the following:

"It makes you feel less alone."

"It's good to hear other peoples' experiences"



New South Wales

Lived experience insights from children and young people with care experience, 2024-2025

Between July 2024
and June 2025
there were 11 Youth
Advisory Groups
held in Northern
Territory.

84 young people
attended these
sessions to share
their insights and
lived
experiences.

Are you
listening?



New South Wales

Who we heard from

Between July 2024 and June 2025, CREATE Foundation facilitated 11 Youth Advisory Group sessions across New South Wales. 84 young people attended these sessions to share their insights and experiences.

Key themes and insights

During the Youth Advisory Groups, young people shared their experiences and their insights into:

- Transition from care
- The Child Protection Week 2024 theme 'Every Conversation Matters'
- How young people living in out-of-home care can be supported to achieve their goals
- Disability inclusion and awareness
- Reflections on the end of the year.
- Accessibility to resources
- "Celebrating Every Journey"
- "March Forward: For ALL Women and Girls."
- Reconciliation for First Nations people in Australia
- Advocating for change and implementation

Transition from care

"You are worthy and no matter your goals, you can accomplish anything."

Young people who were currently preparing to transition from OOHC, and those who had already transitioned from care, shared their experiences of transition from OOHC. Led by young people who had transitioned from care, the group discussed the questions and concerns young people have prior to transitioning to independence.

Young people's questions and concerns were primarily:

- Current system processes and practices that cause young people anxiety, uncertainty and stress
- A lack of transparency related to sharing information about processes, options, supports and resources available to support transition
- System "red tape" leaves young people as the last to know what transition arrangements have been made for them
- The ability to maintain important connections with friends they have made living in their residential setting
- The desire for full involvement in their transition planning from 15 years of age.

"I didn't get to review my case plan until I was 24 and complained to DCJ."

"In my transition plan, I said I want to call my dad and speak to him about it..."

that still hasn't happened yet."

"I don't want to see my parents, but they make me go and see them."

Knowing and exercising their rights emerged as a key theme during the Youth Advisory Group.

"I work in the care space because I want to make it better for the next generations."

Without us (lived experts) the system won't be fixed."

"One of my goals is to get an apartment. I'm in SIL now and working on different things to get an apartment and to make sure I am ready to live in my own apartment."

When asked, all young people over the age of 15 years and yet to transition reported:

- They hadn't started their transition plan with their caseworker, or couldn't remember
- They did not know how involved they were entitled to be in their transition planning
- They noted that materials provided to them talk about the importance of their involvement in the process but didn't feel this is what happens in practice
- They did not know they could review their case or transition plan
- They were unaware that they could review their after-care plan up to 25 years-of-age.

Those young people who had experienced transition spoke about the importance of knowing your rights and advocating for yourself. They felt that it is disappointing that you have to advocate for actions to be taken to fulfil your rights but if you know your rights and ask for them, there are opportunities available, including:

- Contributing to the transition plan, but noting this can met with resistance and/or delays
- Provision of driving lessons
- Choosing to have or not have contact with birth family
- Enrolling in education
- Trips to Country
- Career preparation courses
- Accessing their case files upon turning 18 years of age, which can be very helpful in reviewing transition planning.

Elements of transition plan

The young people were clear about the things that transition plans should include, and the arrangements they want to plan for:

- Connecting to family and culture
- Employment and career – entrepreneur workshops
- Education – TAFE, opportunities for tutoring or mentorship relevant to studying
- Housing – independent apartment, SIL living.

Child Protection Week 2024: ‘Every Conversation Matters’

At one Youth Advisory Group, young people talked about the National Child Protection Week 2024 theme ‘Every Conversation Matters.’ In particular, they discussed the relationships in which the young people feel safe to have conversations about what is important to them. The young people named specific family members, friends, teachers and housemates as those who make them feel safe.

“My grandma makes me feel safe and my friends.”

A concern for young people who live in OOHC is limited access to the people in their lives they feel safest with.

“The people I feel safe with, like my godmother, I can’t actually be around them.”

They observed that trust is the most important quality in a relationship to make them feel safe to confide in. Reflecting on how trust can be built with others, the young people shared this happens when people:

- Take their emotions seriously
- Acknowledge their effort
- Are responsive when they reach out
- Are consistent.

"I wish my worker could understand how and if I'm upset, instead of not taking me seriously and not dismiss me."

"My counsellor, he always answered the phone and helped me out of a lot of things".

"My teacher for sure, she's been there for me for years and like consistent."

In keeping with the theme 'Every Conversation Matters,' the conversation reflected on positive and meaningful conversations the young people have had in the past that stand-out as significant and remain important to them. One young person bravely shared a one-off conversation they had with a person that helped them overcome substance addiction.

"It's only happened once, and he helped me get clean."

How young people in care can be supported to achieve their goals

"Leaving foster care and being in the environment I am today has let me grow into who I am."

The Hon. Minister Kate Washington MP invited CREATE to attend Question Time in NSW Parliament, including lunch with Ministerial guests and CREATE sector friends, and presentations by CREATE Young Consultants. Young people shared their insights and achievements while living in OOHC, including why these achievements have been important to them and how other young people living in OOHC can be supported to achieve their goals. While initially hesitant, with encouragement, the young people recognised their achievements, which included:

- Becoming a CREATE Young Consultant after completing Speak Up training
- Getting a driver's licence
- Influencing positive change (like the ban on Alternative Care Arrangements in NSW)
- Being a published poet
- Being awarded an education scholarship.

The young people articulated their achievements and reflected on their strengths and skills, identifying their confidence, determination, creativity, leadership, ability to advocate, independence, communication and people skills. They also spoke about the context of stigma and adversity in which they exercise their strengths and skills and in which they have achieved.

"I am confident when I walk through that door."

"I am smart. I am confident. I speak up for myself and others."

Each young person prepared a speech for the Youth Parliament event, which took place in November 2024.

Disability Inclusion and Awareness

In anticipation of 2024 International Day of People with a Disability in December, CREATE NSW facilitated a Youth Advisory Group with children and young people living in OOHC who identify as having a disability. This Youth Advisory Group was facilitated in partnership with Wesley Mission, Lifestyle Solutions, and Life Without Barriers, all agencies that work directly with children and young people in care who have a disability.

The location for the Youth Advisory Group was Calmsley Hill City Farm, where participants had the opportunity to explore the farm and interact with a variety of animals and wildlife before and after the Youth Advisory Group. Each partnering agency facilitated a regulating and trauma informed activity to foster a safe and comfortable environment in which discussions relating the Youth Advisory Group theme could safely happen.

The purpose of the Youth Advisory Group was to ask the children and young people what disability inclusion and awareness looks like and feels like, and how inclusion can be fostered within different settings for children and young people. The conversation was guided by 4 of the 5 'Good Practice Guidelines Engagement Principles', as outlined in Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031.

The facilitators took a strength-based approach and began by asking the children and young people what their skills and interests are. Within the group there were diverse skills and interests, such as creative arts, music, sport and fitness, learning, communication and humour.

"Telling jokes – making people laugh."

Organised by the 'Good Practice Guidelines Engagement Principles' the young people described disability inclusion and awareness as:

Build mutual respect

"Be respectful and kind."

"Inclusion looks like friendly, caring, enthusiastic – make me feel good and happy."

"It feels like people relate to me and have understanding."

"Ask me more questions and ask us how we can get involved."

Take responsibility

"Including everyone, not just the ones you want to or like."

"Ask me more questions and ask us how we can get involved."

"Staff seek conversation with young people and connect."

Meet people where they are at

"Take an interest in what I am interested in."

"Exercise – it feels so good."

"Creative things – art, poetry, drawing, music."

"Speaking my thoughts – communication."

Prioritise safety and trust

"Being trusted by people."

"Less judgement."

"Be respectful and kind."

2024 End of year: appreciation and hopes

The final Youth Advisory Group for 2024 saw many new young people come along. Young people talked about the ways they would like to be involved in changing the care system and how CREATE can support this. One young person highlighted the importance of meeting like-minded individuals with similar experiences, which CREATE events make possible. Young people would like more activities during the year. Another young person said they would like to see events held for LGBTQIA+ young people with OOHC experience. Young people also expressed a desire for programs to take place in different locations, like the beach and other outdoor settings.

The young people gave voice to their appreciation of their connection to CREATE.

"It's amazing to meet youth that have similar circumstances. It makes it easier to connect."

"Keep the birthday cards. I don't have family around so having a card show up is amazing."

"I don't have many people in my circle that are. It's amazing to hear others thoughts difficulties, strengths."

When asked about changes they would like to see in the OOHC system the primary areas of desired change for the young people were:

- More contacts to be linked into support services
- Improved connections with services
- Access to high quality services
- Greater mental health support
- Greater facilitation of opportunities to link with aboriginal groups
- Quicker and more efficient adoption process.

Accessibility to resources

Young people living in regional areas shared their significant challenges to accessing resources and services, and the impact this has on their equal opportunity to support and engagement compared to young people living in metropolitan areas.

"The waiting lists [are long] ... because there's not many services. You have these massive waiting lists for everything... like therapy."

"The [agency] office here is ridiculously understaffed. It's a town of like 50,000 people. And there were less than 10 case workers..."

The young people shared that living in regional areas can significantly impact the quality and consistency of services they access, which can directly impact the way they see the world.

"If we want anything somewhat decent, we have to drive 30 minutes..."

"I was too depressed. I didn't really want to talk to people or leave the house, so I kind of just stayed inside."

"I started counselling when I was five and [as a result of placement changes], I often experienced a new Counsellor each placement change]"

"There were long periods of time, like a couple of years, where I would get a monthly caseworker visit. [Then] I wouldn't see them for like four months at a time..."

"It's kind of hard to stick with one like case worker, they're always changing..."

It was highlighted that even when services or programs exist, it's hard to find out about them because they aren't well advertised or shared.

"I think that a regional specific newsletter could be really cool. Like events that were specific to regional kids that are online, it could advertise things like scholarships, bursaries and grants that are available to regional youth who have experienced disadvantage..."

Young people highlighted the financial challenges of living in regional areas, where their expenses accumulate rapidly and activities often require significant consideration around travel costs, such as petrol and vehicle expenses. For those who can't drive, the cost of public transport, including taxis and buses can become an additional burden, further limiting access to opportunities.

"I find it annoying having to drive 30 minutes to get into anything. I love driving, so that's not the issue, but it's the petrol that's the issue because it's so much fuel just to go out for one day..."

They identified, too, limited access to resources can be a consequence of regional communities often prioritising the voices of older generations, leaving young people unheard. The young people highlighted the importance of building connections across generations to enhance their communities, promote mutual understanding and create shared opportunities for growth and collaboration. They suggested engaging with the broader community to create spaces that fosters co-existence between younger and older individuals and the creation of youth councils dedicated to amplifying youth voices within their communities, with a focus on concerns of boredom and creating more opportunities for engagement, connection and inclusion.

"[The child protection agency] would need to come up with the idea and then [support young people to] work alongside the other members of a Council..."

"Being inclusive, making sure that everyone... that wants to join can join, and then that everybody's voices are actually heard..."

"There [are programs for] young people... but when it came to programmes for foster kids, there was [nothing]..."

"Celebrating Every Journey"

The theme of World Care Day 2025 was "Celebrating Every Journey". The theme emphasised the importance of shining a light on the unique stories of young people living with a care experience. At the Youth Advisory Group, young people shared the importance of celebrating their strengths and accomplishments.

"I was told 'I could never achieve anything and that I'm not worth anyone's time'.

"It gave me the motivation to prove everyone wrong." "Being an advocate for myself has... made me better at communicating my needs and things."

A key discussion centred around the emotional experience of uncertainty, exploring what it feels like when things seem like they may never work out. Young people shared feelings of helplessness and a lack of control, with one describing the feeling being akin to being *"in a dark room with no hope"*.

"It hurt. Having no one to support you, no one believing in you... It all made me feel lost, and alone... Or like [I was] drowning and everyone around me is laughing..."

"[There is a] core feeling is helplessness..."

"[It is so important that] I'm the one making the choices now and that matters."

Young people explored how they like to be celebrated in a way that was both comforting and safe for them. They discussed what it means to be seen, and that in order to share their achievements, a foundation built on trust, consistency and connection must come first. One young person reflected on how a patriarchal system had influenced their resistance to sharing their accomplishments. The young person considered that women were often perceived negatively when they express pride in their achievements. This led to a broader conversation about growing up as a female in the care system.

"Your needs aren't as important as other people's, and your needs aren't as important as the men around you..."

Young people explored emotional self-awareness and the impact past experiences have on their present lives. The emotions which influence their ability to learn acceptance create a sense of unity and mutual understanding between them. Many expressed a familiar sentiment—

"I feel that too."

"... I am currently in the process of learning that the [unfavourable] things that happened to me... made me a stronger person. [It] doesn't mean that there isn't a legitimate wound that continues to impact my life and... [may] never stop impacting my life."

"I'm still working on being able to sit with my emotions. I'm much better at intellectualising them than I am at actually experiencing them."

A discussion emerged around seeking support during moments of sadness and loneliness. An instinct is to withdraw rather than reach out, as that often feels unnatural or wrong. However, the young people are learning to lean on their loved ones for support.

"I [felt that I] was never important. It was always my siblings. And so, I learnt to internalise every single emotion that I was feeling or thinking. I'm working [on it] ... but I often just shut down."

"March Forward: For ALL Women and Girls"

The theme for International Women's Day 2025 named by United Nations Women Australia, was "March Forward: For ALL Women and Girls." This theme highlighted the need to accelerate action towards gender equality and ensure that all women and girls have equal rights, opportunities, and empowerment. The Youth Advisory Group explored the importance of self-care, ways young people take care of themselves particularly amidst change, transition into womanhood, friendships and connection in out of home care, areas of needed support, and the implications of social media on self-image. The young people reflected on why self-care is so important among the challenges faced by young people living with an out of home care experience, such as transitioning between homes, understanding and accepting change and/or feelings of being misunderstood by others. The young people explored how they take care of themselves. They highlighted importance of personal goals, such as the desire to live independently in the future and learning how to manage life and living skills such as cooking and cleaning.

"I eat and move my body to make myself feel better"

"For our mental health [and stability]."

"So [we] can learn to live by [ourselves]."

The young people identified that self-care includes taking care of their mental health, recognising that:

"Stress can feel like anger or sadness."

"Stress also causes overthinking and a busy, overwhelmed mind."

Exercise, such as physical activities like swimming and running, was the most common mental health care strategy. Journaling can be a coping strategy. Although journaling can be difficult –

"it makes me confront my emotions, which feels uncomfortable"

- the young people explored how sitting with emotions that feel unfamiliar and hard, is a form of self-care. The young people suggested creative arts (drawing, colouring in, writing poetry), and physical activity as strategies for coping with unfamiliar and uncomfortable emotions. Young people guided a discussion on their experience of puberty while living in an out of home care setting. Young people shared that experiencing their menstruation for the first time was *"hard"* because carers had not had any conversations with them or provided guidance in preparation for this moment.

"...by the time someone spoke to me about it, I already felt so alone in the experience."

The young people described this time as *"isolating"* and a *"missed opportunity for support"*.

Young people shared key experiences in making and maintaining friendships in out of home care. Several young women shared that they find it difficult to *“connect with boys”*, describing that young men often

“cross boundaries by asking private questions and not leaving them alone, which can be frustrating”.

One young person spoke openly about experiences of betrayal in friendships, sharing that

“it made it hard to trust others and feel truly connected”.

She explained that *“living with an out of home care experience added an additional layer of difficulty”*, as friends living in traditional family homes *“didn’t understand”* the nature of her experiences, making her feel *“different or weird”*. The young people were asked what type of support they wished to receive from others when relationships are difficult. Responses included:

“I need someone to talk to when I feel overwhelmed”.

“I value being left alone or simply staying close to someone I trust when things feel hard”

Reconciliation for First Nations people in Australia

Young people shared their insights into what reconciliation means to them, why they believe reconciliation is important and what could be done to better facilitate a meaningful reconciliation experience for First Nations people in Australia.

“To learn from the mistakes [made] and strengthen the bond between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people...”

Young people discussed harmony day as a way of:

“understanding cultural connection”.

“People can learn to understand each other and bond. It helps build tolerance. It would stop a lot of hate and violence.”

Young people described how reconciliation connection events could feel more safe, inclusive and empowering for everyone within the community.

“Reach out to Indigenous services if they want to host with us [CREATE].”

“...Cultural [dance] and cultural music.”

“Make the events age appropriate, [and include activities such as] dot painting, sand art, different stalls with art and sports”

“A professional who they can talk to.”

“Creative writing station. Lined paper, pens etc.”

Advocating for change and implementation

In preparation for the Ministerial Roundtable which took place on Tuesday, 22 July, young people came together for two Youth Advisory Groups, with Minister Kate Washington, to explore how they may use their insights, experiences and voices to advocate for change and implementation. Young people shared:

“...Change comes over time and you have to push for it...”

The ideas young people agreed to explore included, transition support and the need for long-term supports, relational care, and safety and stability. One young person shared their experience of being moved into independent living on their 18th birthday. They described it as:

“overwhelming... suddenly being expected to live alone, manage finances, and navigate adulthood with little support.”

“You're expected to be able to do it all.”

“You're pretty much kicked out and left to fend for yourself with no support whatsoever.”

“For people who have been in care, we don't have the life skills to live on our own... we need more time to work ourselves out and get a job and stuff like... we need stability.”

“Being 19/20 and trying to pay your whole rent by yourself. It's hard, like a lot of us don't have anyone else to support us around that.”

A significant concern raised was the lack of mental health supports available to young people.

“... I believe that the government should invest in a mental [health] support that is specifically for people who have been through the [care] system and have traumatic backgrounds.”

The young people also highlighted the barriers faced in accessing education and employment, while trying to navigate life after care.

“I reckon one big thing, which is something else that I've been going through at the moment, is I've been told that I need to choose between getting a job and [pursing further] education... I've been told that I need to put my education on hold [because I expressed that] I want to go to TAFE and do all my courses.”

“...getting work itself is hard enough for normal people around my age.”

“...being through the system and not having prior work experience and not having a driver's license... [generates] a massive disadvantage...”

“You know, if [they could] cap rent, you [would] never have to worry about [young people] ...”

“[Teaching young people how to budget] is meaningless when you can't afford to live.”

Some ideas to better support young people to achieve a successful transition out of care included continued implementation of The Foyer Model, an out of home care financial support payment, and capped rent costs.

“Access to reliable housing would act as an early prevention strategy to reduce the rates of homelessness and mental health in young people living with a care experience. If a young person had a sense of safety with long-term rental assistance, this would assist them to meet their other needs, and therefore decrease the likelihood of homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse and mental health.”

“I've spent the last year homeless. The requirements to maintain housing, from prices to... having to go into the office, having to go to six inspections a week... makes it like basically [impossible]... I've been on the priority housing list for like 5 years. I feel like there should be allocated, priority [housing] allocations for OOHC.”

“Extending the Independent Living Allowance until 25 to support people leaving care better and increase their chances to get secure housing.”

Young people highlighted that agency workers are of the belief that they know what is best for young people.

“...it always has to be the people above us that have the power to say what we need, when in reality they have no idea what we need because they can do the opposite [of] what we ask for.”

Young people would like to see agencies:

“take a more tailored approach in order to meet each young person’s individual needs rather than utilising a one-size fits all approach”.

The young people recommended integrating review processes that hold agencies accountable for the work they are doing for young people living in, or with, an out-of-home care experience.

“Like having an outside review team... made-up of people who have left the system and advocates... They can review [the processes] and see whether they are doing the right thing. And then if they aren't, that's when disciplinary action [can be taken] ...”

Young people shared that they would like to see the introduction of a collaborative portal to allow for a holistic record keeping system, allowing for the power to not only sit with the one agency, but for more ‘eyes’ to see a child and young person in care. Greater information sharing would hopefully translate to less things being ‘swept under the rug’.

“Through looking at like my own files, [I have noticed that] the notes [have no] detail to them... there should be a certain standard that the notes [are] held to...”

Australian Capital Territory

Lived experience insights from children and young people with care experience, 2024-2025

Between July 2024
and June 2025
there were 11 Youth
Advisory Groups
held in Northern
Territory.

73 young people
attended these
sessions to share
their insights and
lived
experiences.

Are you
listening?



Australian Capital Territory

Who we heard from

Between July 2024 and June 2025, CREATE Foundation facilitated 11 Youth Advisory Group sessions across the ACT, in and around Canberra. 73 young people attended these sessions to share their insights and experiences.

Key themes and insights

During the Youth Advisory Groups, young people shared their experiences and their insights into:

- Educating the Educator
- Educating the Educator: Next Steps
- Preferred providers
- Carers
- Advocating for change and implementation
- Transition planning
- Community connections
- Out of home care provider resources
- Transition resources for children and young people

Educating the Educator

The Youth Advisory Groups in the second half of 2024 continued to focus on young people's project to develop a resource to help schools and teachers to understand, engage with, and support the learning of young people who live in out-of-home care. During the Youth Advisory Groups sessions, young people reflected on their conversations in previous Youth Advisory Groups and shaped the practice advice for school staff and teachers to include in the resource.

The young people considered their own experiences at school, reflecting on these questions:

- What do you have at school that makes you feel safe?
- Can you describe the best class you had last week? What were you doing? What was the teacher doing?
- What would be a good way for kids to let their teacher know they're not feeling safe?
- What do you want teachers to know about what life was like for you before OOHC?
- When I'm not in a space to listen at school, I wish my teacher knew...

The young people's thinking and discussion culminated in a four-part educator resource framework, with suggested content for each part. The goal is for the resource to be piloted in a number of ACT schools.

The Educating the Educator resource describes key knowledge for schools and teachers:

1. Trauma informed practice
2. Safe space
3. Stigma
4. Academic supports and needs.

Part 1. Trauma informed practice – key knowledge described by young people

Understanding Trauma:

"There are lots of different things that can make things more challenging for us in the classroom.

For example, care type can make a difference. If we're in residential care it's hard for us to even get to school."

"Having support for both trauma and neurodiversity is important in the classroom.

Often, we don't have a chance for our neurodiversity or trauma to be diagnosed while in the school system. This means that responses are often incomplete or based on a misunderstandings or assumptions about what we might be struggling with."

"Understanding of trauma needs to be embedded into all levels of school operations, including policies and procedures as well as in-person interactions and teaching styles."

Trauma informed tips/actions/practices:

Young people recommend that all teachers are able to:

“recognise typical trauma behaviours e.g. difficulty self-regulating, withdrawal, self-destructive behaviour, an appearance of shutting down or inability to focus” and know the best response to support a young person.

Young people want *“goals that are clear and attainable.”*

Part 2 Safe Space – key knowledge described by young people

Regulating space:

“We really want to learn and be a part of the school environment but we are struggling. This can look like anger, choosing not to engage, or being really unfocused, but it’s actually that we are feeling unsafe and distressed.”

Young people provided tips on *“how to make us feel safe”*

- Teacher practice accommodates the experience of trauma: includes both fun and calming activities and acceptance of stress-relieving tools
- There is a focus on genuine relationships and mutual trust
- Schools and teachers create inclusive environments where young people’s voices are heard and considered.

“We want to have genuine opportunities to shape any related discussion and decisions. We also want your support and for our caseworkers to be involved in discussions, because they can help make sure that we can access the help that we’re after.”

Part 3 Stigma – key knowledge described by young people

The young people spoke about feeling isolated, stigmatised, discriminated against, and viewed as *“no good or a lost cause.”*

“We feel very different to our peers due to our care experience”.

The young people said that their engagement at school is supported when teachers:

- Understand different kinds of stigmatisation
- Are sensitive to how stigmatisation is felt differently by different young people
- Understand how young people experience the impact of stigmatisation at school.

“We feel further stigmatised and unsafe when [dysregulation] is seen as bad behaviour.”

“We want our teachers’ help in getting back to a place of safety so we can stay engaged in learning.”

Young people identified the levels of stigma they encounter in their schools from “worst” to “not as bad.”

“School treating me better, not like I am nothing.”

“When we think about our teachers knowing about us being in care, we worry about being discriminated against – either positively or negatively.”

Part 4 Academic Supports and Needs – key knowledge described by young people

“We want adults to recognise our potential and dream big for us, so we can.”

The young people identified their engagement at school is supported when teachers:

- Believe in them
- Know the types of support that works for the young people
- Understand individual young people’s needs related to their care experience.

This is what young people had to say about practices they think are important at school:

- Recognition that young people have aspirations. They feel most supported when those around them believe in their potential and set high expectations for them.
- Support has to be responsive to individual young people’s needs.
- Tutoring, mentoring, homework clubs and other forms of one-on-one learning support.
- Schools fully implementing an individual young person’s learning and/or support plan.
- Diagnosis of neurodiversity, optic needs and other physical or mental health factors that might impact learning.
- Academic support delivered through personalised learning options that prioritise a young person’s view while including those of carers, teachers and caseworkers.
- The design of personalised learning options that are strengths-based and goal-oriented.
- Learning ‘chunked’ into small steps or concepts to lessen overwhelm.
- Focus breaks during classroom learning.
- Adjustment to assignments to accommodate a young person’s individual situations and learning needs.
- Adjustment of the learning environment to support a young person to engage in the learning. For example, consider noise levels, lighting, and material textures.

“We don’t always know all of the education options that are out there but we do know what sort of support we would find most helpful, and we want you to listen to us when we say what we need and help us find that support.”

Young people identified support during transitions as crucial, such as transitions between schools or transitions from primary school to high school. Young people feel well supported when their teachers document teaching strategies, learning supports, and environment adjustments and pass the information to their next learning setting.

“Believe in us and our potential.”

Educating the Educator: Next Steps

The plan is to develop an in-person workshop delivered to school wellbeing teams, so these staff will can better support the students they work with, and share this knowledge through their school communities. The intention is that CREATE Young Consultants will be involved in these workshops to share their lived experiences of the education system and strategies for best supporting students.

Preferred providers

Young people shared their thoughts on the change from the ACT Together consortium to Children, Youth, and Families' preferred providers. The CYF Preferred Providers is made up of several non-government organisations, including Aboriginal and Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), with the aim of supporting children, young people and families involved with, or at risk of becoming involved with, the ACT's child protection system by connecting them with support services they might need, when they need it, in the way that works for them. Young people shared their insights on what they know about the implementation of this change.

"I've heard that the [CYF Preferred Providers] are trying to do better because ACT Together was such a disaster."

Young people shared their experience of ACT Together.

"I was just thrown in to disability care... I bounced between [NDIS] and foster care... I don't want this happening to other young people..."

"It took [me] a year [to access] my TILA payment [while others who were a part of ACT Together accessed it right away]."

The young people explored the information that has been provided to them about CYF Preferred Providers and shared how this information was delivered. Young people shared that the information made available to them was shared with them by the Create Foundation.

"[Communicating] change [in a timely manner] is important..."

"[Honesty and transparency is important] ..."

Young people have expressed that there is a lack of clear communication pertaining to the CYF Preferred Providers. The implementing provider of the model stated that the changes are "intended to be slow and communicated well", however young people queried what "slow" and "communicated well" would look like for them. Young people also shared that the way the message is delivered can be critical. Specifically, young people commented that where they were going to be assigned a new Caseworker, they would appreciate that this is actioned in a gradual and structured way, to ensure they are provided the opportunity to develop a secure working relationship with their respective Caseworker.

"It is important [that it is communicated in a way that we can understand] ... [young people] need to be reassured that they're safe..."

"Change is really scary, so it's important to have it communicated well."

Young people suggested the following ways that could support the communication of change.

“Provide Psychological support with the change. Workers need to have empathy around this.”

“It would be [helpful] to have an after-care drop-in centre to [access support].”

Protecting their social connections, self-image and removing the potential of stigma from developing were primary concerns. One young person shared an instance where a Caseworker requested to meet with them at their school, and other students were made aware of this.

“Classmates [have asked me if] I was in care... It [was] embarrassing.”

Carers

Young people expressed concerns regarding the quality of safeguarding in the recruitment of carers and expressed a desire to explore this further with the Create Foundation. Young people were provided with the current criteria used for carer authorisation. Here, concerns were raised regarding the adequacy of the screening process and checks. Young people queried whether *“processes [were being followed], [whether] carers were [misleading] the system, or carers were [not being provided ample information and training] in caring for children young people”*. Young people suggested the integration of a *“reference check should occur [in screening a carer], like you would for any job”* and reflected on the impact of agencies being under resourced, with the potential to impact an individual’s overall care experience.

Other suggestions made by young people regarding placement outcomes included:

“[Sharing my] history [is] traumatic and...”

“Closer [monitoring] of the placement [by the] caseworker... in the early stages of the placement.”

Young people shared barriers in knowing and understanding their rights while residing in out of home care, which has resulted in limitations in advocating for themselves.

“[We didn’t know] our rights so we didn’t... know we could talk to someone about it.”

Young people living with a residential care experience shared their understanding of the role of an Official Visitor, however expressed that they were not made aware of what they do, and suggestions were made for an *“Official Visitor to visit foster care placements”*. Further, young people suggested the application of a *“central space that a young person could visit to consult with an Official Visitor.”*

“[It should be] a space like this (The CREATE Foundation).”

Young people highlighted the financial constraints of living in residential care.

“They wouldn’t take us to the shops when we were out of toiletries...”

Young people provided suggestions on how child protections agencies might revise the way money is distributed to be more inclusive of their needs.

“...financial support [could be provided] directly to the young person.”

“Carers [should use a financial plan akin to an] aftercare plan which [outlines] areas for support...”

“[I] have started paying for my own mental health supports...”

Young people expressed that they felt a sense of agency where they were provided access to carers and/or caseworkers who treated them as adults, engaged in meaningful conversation and addressed their concerns.

“It’s much more than processing an invoice for us. It’s about being able to have a conversation with us.”

Advocating for change and implementation

In preparation for meet and greet with Minister Michael Pettersson which took place on Wednesday, 26th of March 2025, young people came together, to explore how they may use their insights, experiences and voices to advocate for change and implementation with the Minister. Common themes highlighted by young people included a longing to feel heard and understood and to be treated with humility and respect by those supporting and advocating for them, a revision of Case Work recruitment and retention, and direct consultation with children and young people.

“[Considerations and the implementation of] lived experience positions [within the sector].”

“Young people [should] sit on a recruitment panel.”

“[Caseworkers should] receive the right training early.”

Young people reflected on the unique position those with lived experience are in to invite influential and necessary change within the child protection sector. However, young people continued to reflect on the barriers which may hinder their ability to share their expertise productively, i.e., education that leads to employment in the sector.

Young people shared experiences of abuse perpetrated by Caseworkers and urged there be revision to reflect an improved recruitment process which focus on a suitability criterion that protects and empowers children and young people living with a care experience.

Young people invited a conversation on transitioning out of care, and the critical role that Caseworkers hold in supporting the transition process.

“Caseworkers [are not aware] of what young people entitled to [access] as they age out, making [engagements] tense and confusing.”

Two young people shared art pieces they wished to share with Minister Michael Pettersson.

‘Understand our point of view’ illustrates that when you are looking at something from different perspectives, you receive a different view. The young person felt that their point of view was not seen by caseworkers.

‘Understand our past and future’ illustrates that there are things that are hidden and under the surface, and these need to be considered and understood by the caseworker alongside the focus on a future.

Transition planning

With the introduction of the Extension of Care to 21, and the Next Steps for Our Kids reform the Public Advocate invited collaboration from children and young people to better understand their views of the campaign delivery and execution.

Young people shared the importance of inviting children and young people to be involved in structured, timely and informed planning to achieve successful transition planning.

“Being a part of transition planning in an age-appropriate way is important.”

“[The transition planning] approach does not [account] for a young person's needs and perspectives.”

“A strengths-based approach is useful...”

Young people reflected on the importance of maintaining and sustaining a life which holds space for self-care, independent living skills and finances.

“[I was expected to know how to engage in] self-care and [to know how to] engage in positive hobbies, while also navigating the shift to independence/adulthood...”

“[I] had to teach myself [independent living skills by using] YouTube... other kids learned these things from [their] parents.”

“Having money, and not having money, were both challenging.”

Young people shared the importance of knowing how to advocate for themselves and how this can positively shape their transition planning experience. Young people also shared the limitations and barriers that are faced during transition planning, suggesting that after care support can be exhausting and burdensome.

“For me, [I question whether] it is worth the fight? I'm already fighting housing etc. I had to argue with [the department] for a year to access TILA.”

“Continuum of care is spoken of but does not always happen.”

Young people explored their priorities in transition planning, for some young people housing and homelessness were front and centre of their transition planning priorities. Young people expressed experiencing significant stress in navigating housing and reliance on system and support service engagement, accessibility, stability and insecurity. Other concerns related to mental health and feelings of uncertainty, and loneliness.

“If you're not stable you can't get anything done.”

“Unless I scream and pound the walls, they're not going to listen to you.”

Young people shared their knowledge on reviewing a transition plan, with some young people feeling informed of their right to review their plan, with others suggesting the process was not always linear. Young people explored the development of barriers in reviewing and adhering to transition plans, particularly for young people living with a disability.

“Knowing it can be changed doesn't mean it will be changed.”

“It's hard enough to navigate life, there's not enough energy to advocate for yourself.”

"[Young people are often] deferred to NDIS."

"Children and young people [living] with a disability disappear in the system."

Young people were consulted on what they feel is absolute and necessary to successfully transition out of out of home care.

"We need a safety net – kids don't move out of home at 18, it's not normal."

"Prioritise talking about after care entitlements."

"[Envisage more for us]."

Community connections

Young people explored relationships and connections, specifically how young people might strengthen a positive relationship and overcome challenges in relationships. Young people highlighted that their experiences were often shaped by trauma and negative experiences. Common themes included an innate difficulty to trust others, and perceived unsafety within relationships. Young people shared experiences of hypersensitivity to non-verbal cues such as body language and how the phrase "I understand" would often invite feelings of unease.

"Saying something along the lines of 'I'm sorry to hear about that' was more helpful as it indicated care and concern, [with an element of sincerity]."

"[Assessing the] body language of my friends who [were aware of my] history [allowed me to understand] who was safe."

"No one [can] truly understand unless they [have] been through the same thing..."

Out of home care provider resources

Young people expressed an interest in learning about provider resources, and how they might be consulted to improve existing resources. Young people emphasised the importance of communication and consultation with young people with lived experience. Young people suggested the introduction of a worker guidebook. With most young people emphasising the sheer importance of using a child and young people-centred approach was necessary to achieve successful connection and engagement with children and young people.

"Communication should be based on an understanding of the individual..."

"A guidebook could [reduce the need for us] to continually repeat [ourselves]."

Transition resources for children and young people

Young people were consulted regarding the development of young people-friendly transition from care resources. Consultation was invited to facilitate the Next Steps for Our Kids reform. The department made suggestions to explore modes of resources, these included the use of posters, flyers, videos, and checklists. Young people suggested the use of social media to communicate aftercare support and the rights of children and young people. Further suggestions were made to provide aftercare resources to educational institutions (i.e., schools), allied health supports (i.e., psychologists), service providers (i.e., housing, youth centres, CAMHS, Bimberi, PCYC, Office for Youth and Wellbeing, Centrelink, etc.) and legal entities (i.e., Children's Court) to enhance accessibility for children and young people.

Young people explored barriers to adhering to common or existing practice.

"[Sharing] resources on the [departments] website [is] not likely to result in young people accessing [them]."

"[Accessibility] is important."

Young people made suggestions on what they would like to see included in aftercare resources.

"[Predicted wait times to access] support."

"[Young people] entitlements."

"How you can access aftercare supports, if you [are not assigned] a worker."

"Accommodation options as part of an aftercare support plan."

"[More information for those who have] moved interstate."

Young people identified existing barriers in accessing aftercare support where they had become disconnected from agencies before ageing out of care.

"While there is a self-refer pathway, this is often not known to young people and can be challenging to [navigate] even when it is known to young people."

Victoria

Lived experience insights from children and young people with care experience, 2024-2025

Between July 2024 and June 2025 there were 11 Youth Advisory Groups held in Northern Territory.

58 young people attended these sessions to share their insights and lived experiences.

Are you listening?



Victoria

Who we heard from

Between July 2024 and June 2025, CREATE Foundation facilitated 11 Youth Advisory Group sessions across Victoria, with 58 young people attending these sessions to share their insights and experiences.

Key themes and insights

During the Youth Advisory Groups, young people shared their experiences and their insights into:

- Being at School for Young People Living in Care
- Social Media Restrictions for Children and Young People
- Self-Expression and Identity
- Young People's Understanding and Attitudes about Voting
- Transition to Adulthood: Budgeting and Managing Money
- Accessibility to Information Resources
- Barriers to Connection and Recognition for Young People in Care
- Connecting with Culture, Heritage, and Identity in Care

Being at School for Young People Living in Care

"Teachers need to go through training. They don't really know how to support you. Training to give them the tools is what we're hoping for. Right now, it's just getting teachers to understand the behaviours so they know what to do with someone who is [in] OOHC, so they can understand, not necessarily relate, but understand."

"...sometimes the people you trust are not trained in how to help you."

The young people's conversation explored experiences of school for young people living in OOHC and was broad -ranging. The young people shared their insights into teacher and school staff capacity to support them, appropriate and inappropriate support practices, and the importance of inclusion and inclusive practices. A theme in their conversation was their experiences of stigmatisation and bullying, and how to address these behaviours.

"...I was asked to sit out of NAPLAN because I was 'too stupid' to get good marks on NAPLAN. I was called stupid in front of the class."

"[At] my last school, I didn't want my teachers to know [I was living in OOHC] and they said they needed to, against my wishes. It was like the school believed in me less, not letting me try things, and left me feeling segregated from classmates."

"[Being] bullied by the teachers...then I just don't bother going to school."

For the young people, schools need to invest in professional learning for staff so all adults working in schools understand the OOHC system and the situations and experiences of children and young people living in OOHC. The young people expressed that to be safe and secure at school, ideally every adult would be a person they could trust and confide in. The young people identified that inclusive practices and trusting relationships are key to their sense of belonging and engagement in school. These practices include:

- Providing safe environments that support children and young people confidentially confiding their concerns
- Being able to recognise unconscious exclusion of those living in OOHC in whole school and classroom activities, and innovating for inclusion
- Using language that is inclusive of children and young people living in OOHC in all school activities and communications
- Being proactive in keeping those living in OOHC safe from stigmatisation and resulting bullying

"In years 5/6, I had a principal who gave me a lot of support – calling me on the loud speaker with a quote every day. He was happy to see me, and made an effort."

"[There was a] Year 7 high school student wellbeing leader/vice principal – every day, when I go in, I would go into his office and chat with him for half an hour before starting classes. He was very supportive, with ideas, and alternate perspectives."

"I'm for schools dropping the parent/guardian paperwork signing on forms. I'd rather it just said 'guardian' as everyone is the same then."

"At my new school, only the Principal and my coordinator know and it works a lot better. My new Principal put her own name down as contact/parent to protect my privacy."

The young people recognised that inclusion of children and young people with a care experience, and ending stigmatisation and bullying, can only be possible when being in OOHC is “normalised” instead of considered as “different” and “bad.”

“Yeah, at school you don’t want to be known as an OOHC kid. [You] don’t want to be different or singled out. At my school, everyone knows and there are rumours about me and my mum. At one point it was so bad I didn’t want to go to school. Everyone normalises divorce but OOHC is not normalised.”

“I don’t think being in care should be normalised, but accepting children and young people in care should be. Adults (teachers) should be mindful of these different things.”

To achieve this inclusion, the young people identified education for inclusion needs to begin as early as children’s early years of learning.

“You have to start younger to educate them.”

“It will then flow on to the next generation. They will teach their kids. But for now, you need to teach them at a younger age. To slowly implement change to make it equal.”

Social Media Restrictions for Children and Young People

The young people gathered online to have a wide-ranging conversation that tackled the complexities of the Federal government’s (at the time) proposed social media ban for children and young people. The young people understood the dangers social media presents to young people: dangers they had themselves encountered. The group’s commentary also identified the benefits young people gain from using social media. For young people living in OOHC, there are particular benefits, which the social media ban would impact.

“Social networking is important... There’s very limited resources for creating sustained friendships for kids in out-of-home-care. Don’t take away something that helps. Maybe the age should be 13.”

Two themes emerged as benefits of using social media that young people had experienced: connection and education. Young people spoke of social media providing ways to:

- Communicate with friends
- Keep in contact with other people in similar situations, like other young people with OOHC experience and organisations like CREATE Foundation
- Organise meetups
- Connect with the wider world
- Find hobbies
- Find tutorials online that inspire them
- Access services.

"I got lots of info through services like Yammer, so tarnishing all social media with the same brush is not helpful."

"I learnt a lot about the world having access to social media... There was racism in my town and I would have become a typical racist person if I had stayed there and not had social media access. I learnt about how the world worked through YouTube, especially as I had difficulties going to school."

"I learnt how to advocate for myself through online resources – YouTube, Reddit, Wikihow."

"Social media helped me get modelling jobs when I was younger. I've only seen the positive sides of social media."

While acknowledging the benefits, the young people also identified the risks involved in social media use and, while believing tech companies should carry responsibility for content, widely supported an age restriction on its use for children under 13. They equated an age restriction with age restrictions on alcohol consumption, driving, and video game age ratings.

"Despite the benefits... at a young age, with use of social media, I believe children are susceptible to predators, unhealthy trends/habits, such as those associated with appearance or eating. My big one is bullying."

The risks to young people when using social media identified by the group included:

- Compromised safety
- Bullying
- Abuse
- Stalking
- Unhealthy trends or false information
- Exposure to explicit sexual and violent content
- Disconnection from reality
- Addiction
- Identity theft.

"I think personally, I've always experienced the worst bullying via social media or online platforms. I feel it's so much easier to slander someone with names and yucky phrases on their post rather than in a classroom surrounded by physical people. I do agree [a ban] wouldn't remove all bullying, but substantially decrease [it]."

"As a young person in care, having social media at a young age posed a threat to my safety, as my abusers etc knew where I was, what I was doing, who I hung around etc. and me being a kid, didn't understand the safety concerns."

"I'd say 13-14 years. I feel it's a pretty average age for a young person to begin maturing and understanding the true risks involved, BUT WITH education to know how to act appropriately in the event they are approached by a predator or are a victim of bullying."

While much agreement was held within the group, the young people grappled with the complexities of the issues and there were differing views expressed.

"When I was in residential care, I saw many things that I wish I hadn't through MMS msgs and you can't ban them. The alternative to social media isn't that this stuff vanishes, it just moves to another medium."

"I feel like age restrictions are a good thing for really young kids to protect them from gore or sexually explicit content. Like, if it was 15+ they would be old enough to make their own decisions on the world around them. Not to say they should have access to that [content] at all, whatsoever."

"I don't think raising the age for social media is helpful, rather they should hold companies responsible for what is shared on social media."

"Why not supervise the use, rather than restrict it? What about Roblox? You can still interact with friends with limited messaging, but they are heavily controlled."

"...there should be education around teaching people how to avoid a mindset of comparing themselves to influencers and unrealistic expectations of themselves. Teaching how to use social media in a healthy way."

The young people were unanimous in their view that everyone has a role to play in protecting children and young people from harm in social media spaces.

Governments should:

Hold companies accountable for the content they host and should provide public education programs about safe use.

"From the perspective of young people with a care experience, I see it as black and white personally. The government should make sure that children in their care should be kept safe."

Guardians should:

"Make sure they know whether their young people are ready to access the internet and not allow them access to anything inappropriate."

"...educate their children, possibly even monitor comments or something similar, but in a collaborative way not an interrogational way."

Tech companies should:

"...not be providing a place for content that results in loss of life. They should be responsible for removing content that is problematic without fuss."

"...stop outsourcing moderator work to robots that don't know what context is."

"...create private accounts for youth."

Schools should:

"...be responsible for making sure their devices are being used for appropriate things and not for bullying."

"[use] a school based social network system, or school district to include friends in other schools."

"...guide [young people] on interpreting different online material, such as being able to detect language that may subtly influence their mindsets and teaching them healthy expectations so that they can interact with media and be less likely influenced by what they might think they 'lack' or 'need.' Similar to how we're taught 'persuasive language' during English class, determining the wording and intention of things."

Self-Expression and Identity

This Youth Advisory Group was an opportunity for young people to be creative and talk about how they express themselves creatively and how their creativity helps develop their identity. They shared:

"I love musicals. They're an escape that takes your mind off of life."

"I had a casual passion for dancing and my carer got me into it."

"Art chills me out, I can play some tunes and zoom in on what I'm doing now rather than what's before or coming later."

They also shared connections between their creative expression and their exploration of identity.

"I've always been passionate for singing. It's another form of talking out what you're going through."

"I first started by singing with my grandpa who would play the harmonica. I think I still sing to keep his spirit alive."

"Every painting you see has a story behind it. It may be traumatic or sad. It has a story."

The story shared by an Aboriginal young person underscored the importance of culturally safe practices when encouraging an Aboriginal young person's creative interest.

"My identity is Aboriginal. I first felt connected when I was at Uluru. I was looking at paintings by old Indigenous women and I realised I could read their drawings. Once I found out, I felt rushed into it by DFFH. They referred me to gathering places, camps, and things, and I'd just found out and now they're sending me off everywhere. For me, my Aboriginality yanks part of me but it doesn't pull me because it's from my dad's side and I'm not close to that side and they're far away."

Voting and the Victorian Youth Parliament CREATE hosted a Youth Advisory Group in which the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) came to speak with the young people about the opportunity to be involved in Victoria's Youth Parliament. Each year Victorian young people aged 16-25 years are invited to apply to participate in Youth Parliament. The Youth Parliament experience sees 20 teams of 6 young people developing proposed legislation for change in law on issues they care about. Replicating parliamentary procedure, the team's Bills are tabled and debated and voted upon by the young people "members". Every Bill passed in the Youth Parliament sessions are passed on to the Youth Minister for consideration. It is a great platform for young people to have a say on social concerns important to them and advocate for themselves. At the conclusion of the VEC presentation, the young people talked about what they learned.

"I think it's an important life skill to know about voting."

"I didn't know the VEC was impartial. I thought they were run by government."

"I feel like more the separation [between] state and local governments is good. That way [people] have more direct issues heard more. I feel like your voice could be heard more."

"[The] state is the one we probably would all care about most. Given it affects wherever we live in Victoria. That's where most the change happens, not much changes in local."

"I don't really spend much time in my community, so I don't really know much about the people who were going for council. I spend more time in other communities."

The young people also considered barriers to registering to vote and to voting in elections encountered by young people living in OOHC.

"Fines makes it difficult for people, like [the VEC] don't know why people don't vote."

"There needs to be more information for rural and remote areas about voting. I just didn't know about things just because of where I lived."

"There's no information at my school. They just don't teach that sort of stuff... If they aren't teaching it in schools, then you're figuring it out on your own and there's not really anyone to ask about it."

Transition to Adulthood: Budgeting and Managing Money

Young people discussed how they had minimal guidance and education on budgeting and managing money while in out-of-home care and had to figure it out largely on their own through lived realities or informal learning.

"I didn't realise I learnt budgeting, I just grew up with no money. I had a single Mum who was studying, I just knew that when I asked for things from Mum and she would say "maybe, if I can"."

"I'm always budgeting without realising I'm doing it."

"I learnt how to budget mostly myself, but I also learnt a lot through a managing money life skills course, [I learned] things like scams, differences between needs and wants, insurance, savings, etc."

"Before I was 20, I was given money for the first time and I was blowing it. So, I called the bank and asked if they have any advice for me... The bank worker was the first person who taught me to open an account and what interest was."

"Care experienced young people don't have the foundation to learn it all."

"Workers won't tell you how to spend your money, they'll just advise it and then they just stop."

"I learnt more about how to make money rather than how to save or manage it."

Young people then talked about the psychological and emotional challenges they had around managing and spending money. Several concerns emerged around an unhealthy relationship with money, including feelings of guilt or anxiety while spending, even on necessities, and the strain of a survival budget, such as the dilemma of deciding between paying rent or purchasing food.

"I bought new shoes, which was a good investment (for school or everyday wear), but I still felt that guilt."

"When I started to earn more, I couldn't control my money with my spending. I'm getting better at it, but still working on it."

"Deciding between groceries and rent, for me who has experienced homelessness, it will always be rent. Sometimes, I would just have a packet of chips for dinner, so I'm still eating, but I can still make rent."

"I learnt that I had the responsibilities to pay rent and bills, in comparison to when I was 16 years old where I had no responsibilities."

"People who don't grow up with disadvantaged or in OOHC, they say 'it's just a drink or meal', but, no, that could be towards other things. It can be really hard."

The importance of an accessible, structured, and early financial education, ideally prior to transitioning to adulthood, was brought up by young people. They identified the need to acquire not only money-managing skills but also holistic life survival skills from the carers, workers, and also the community.

"People need extra support [on] where they can get the right information; it needs to be done nationally even."

"I think we need to take a more holistic view [of the whole thing], not just managing money."

"[On what they would like to learn more in terms of managing money:] The habits you have with money. How you spend [the money] makes the biggest difference."

"I think I want to learn about the psychology of money, saving, and relationship with money. My family had a lot of conflict because of money."

"Helping people find jobs that they can do, like for people with disabilities."

The young people identified several resources, information, and knowledge they would like to access to strengthen their financial management skills and thrive in their future, including:

- Having a healthy mindset and relationship with money
- Understanding how credit scores work
- Knowing how to do their taxes properly
- Learning how to spend money wisely
- Planning and saving for the future
- Finding the right support when moving into adulthood

Having the right support while young people are in care, and later when they transition into adulthood, is truly crucial. It helps them build the skills to support themselves, become financially independent, and manage money in a healthy way. One young person shared that not having a basic understanding of money management, combined with barriers to accessing support, has made their transition to adulthood even more challenging.

“Money was always difficult for my grandparents; I had a basic understanding that I should save and try not to spend on unnecessary things. I experienced a DV situation, and I was trying to care for myself. I was in recovery for a long time, so I moved back into my parents’ place.”

These insights highlight the importance of providing consistent, accessible support so young people in care can move into adulthood with confidence, independence, and the skills to thrive.

Accessibility to Information Resources

Having the right resources and support is important for the young people in care, especially as they prepare to transition into adulthood. Access to practical information and guidance can help them to make informed decisions and to navigate challenges in housing, career, health, finance, education, and employment.

“I want to make sure I’m making the right decisions for myself.”

Building on those needs, young people gathered to express their thoughts over the Sortli app, a free mobile application designed by youth for youth, aimed at providing advice to navigate the transition to adulthood. The Sortli App provides thorough step-by-step guidance for youth, covering topics such as securing housing, maintaining health, managing finances, seeking employment, pursuing training, and understanding legal rights. The following is feedback from the youth on the Sortli app:

“I thought it was pretty good, the fact that there were so many aspects that you can choose. Descriptions, visuals, and some videos...with different links to other support services.”

“I like the quizzes. Would be good if you could favourite some of the example goals, and make your own goal steps by breaking it down.”

“Sortli App is well organized and easy to access. It was pretty easy to navigate.”

"It was the first time I've been able to navigate to find my TFN."

While young people shared positive feedback on the Sortli app, they also noted that there are a few features that could be improved:

"The budget planner was a little complicated and not that helpful."

"It's not very ADHD friendly, for example —when you choose a topic (housing), it's a large list and overwhelming from the list."

"Quizzes are kinda fun, and it would be good to create your own little profile."

"It should be that when you delete the app, some 'how to link it up' info follows you. If you get a new phone, the goals are [then] transferred, rather than resetting everything."

"The slabs of texts are confusing overall. The videos are outdated; they were filmed when the app was first created, [so] it feels old."

"Values section questions were too confining and specific; they served to teen stereotypes, such as 'going shopping with my friends.' It feels like it hasn't been co-designed with YP..."

"Age-wise it's too broad; it would be beneficial if it gave you push notifications that is relevant to your age range. For example, push notifications about being 18 years old and that you can vote now."

In addition, young people also contributed ideas on how the features could be improved to make the Sortli app more useful and engaging:

"I would like to see a place where you can access help to navigate MyGov for a health care card, low income card, etc, and how to apply for things in the website."

"Inclusive language, for example – most WOMEN experience this during pregnancy (should use people/they)."

"...It would be good to create your own little profile."

"I wonder if there could be a web chat. Some young people don't like to call on the phone I think you would have to be pretty confident to do that."

"There needs to be stuff about body image and eating disorders."

"Each section could have a video made by young people for young people."

"Also, just including resources for young people in different cultural groups, [with] disabilities, [who are] LGBTQIA+, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, etc."

"Topics on self-compassion, self-care, and self-love (reminders for self-care or self-love check-ins). Being able to save your favourite quotes and look back on them when people need reminders."

CREATE Foundation will use these insights collected from young people at the Youth Advisory Group to inform the Sortli app development.

Barriers to Connection and Recognition for Young People in Care

Young people shared on the barriers in having a strong and good relationship with their worker in residential care.

"In residential care, they have workers that should be more welcoming and talk about 'what's going on?' rather than just saying things like, 'Oh, you will be fine.'"

"[On what they want their workers to know about their care experience:] that it is not always a good place you are in."

Some young people felt stereotyped and dehumanised, facing stigma and false assumptions during their OOHC experience.

"Hope the worker can actually take the time to talk and listen. Feel like some workers just speak, like, because I'm Aboriginal, they speak like, 'Oh, because you are Aboriginal, average Aboriginal will be like this'. A lot of assumptions that are not true... It makes me feel like we are the bad people and they are the good people."

"In care, does not mean we are going to be in the trouble. In a certain age group or certain situation, does not mean that we will act in a certain way. It's not just about care but also for teenager group. It has kind of dehumanised us and our experience."

Young people also highlighted the importance of carers or workers in the OOHC system treating children and young people as though they were their own children.

"I feel like foster carers, some of them, should treat the young people the same way as their own kids."

"Some of them just tick the box, finish their shift and leave. As soon as they got paid, they are not doing anything. At the same time, from what I experienced, as a family you do something and you get cared, loved, and feel connected, but in residential care, the worker just seeing it as a job."

Young people identified the need for their creativity to be nurtured as part of their identity exploration. However, they expressed concern that this important aspect of their personal growth may be overlooked in the OOHC system.

"Being creative gives me more power, it gives me hope..."

"I was always encouraged in my creativity. Residential care doesn't really foster the most nurturing environment, they really need to think about what the young people likes, and how does being in care affect them – do they stop being creative in care? Don't take away the light in their eyes."

"...Creative thinking can sometimes help in a surprising way..."

Despite the challenges they faced in OOHC, young people reflected on the resiliency and personal strength they developed through these experiences. They shared how discovering their personal strength supported them in navigating their circumstances and planning for the future.

“Being passionate about what you do can help you go through difficult times and help you finish school, get a qualification, and so on.”

“Being the best person I can, especially for the little one, I want to work as a disability support worker, being a worker that I can actually sit down and talk to people, listen to them.”

“A personal strength of me was that, when I got pregnant, I felt like everything around me changed... I feel like I want to be the best person for my son, I want to make sure that I made my best for my child. I would think what I don’t want my kid to go through and how to make sure that does not happen to him.”

Young people also shared how important it is for their workers and carers to support them in discovering their personal strengths and navigating life challenges.

“[My worker] is very supportive and sees me growing up. I wasn’t getting along with my grandparents when I was a teenager; the worker saw that and also saw me bullied at school. She worked with me to get through all of these, [including] my relationship with [my] grandparents.”

“A lot of my personal strength I have; I didn’t find out until I started my high school with more support and supportive people. They helped me to acknowledge my strength better and made me feel like not everything I did was bad.”

Connecting with Culture, Heritage & Identity in Care

Young people shared about their struggle to connect with their own culture or heritage. First Nations young people shared that they grew up without opportunities to connect to their culture due to disrupted family ties or experiences related to the Stolen Generations.

“I struggle with connection to culture because I don’t know my culture due to Stolen Generations.”

“I didn’t grow up with an identity with my culture; I didn’t have many opportunities.”

“I don’t really know my culture, I don’t know my heritage.”

“...Connecting to [my] culture is something I struggle with, and I don’t really know what options there are for me.”

Young people also expressed a desire for practitioners to provide more meaningful support in discovering their self-identity, reconnecting with their family, and engaging with their cultural heritage and practices. They felt that the support was on a surface level and based on assumptions about ‘how they look’ instead of reflecting their true cultural identity.

“[An Aboriginal-controlled community organisation] is supposed to help find my family, but they gave up on me.”

“Many workers say they respect young people’s culture, and they do, but not many of them will do something to support it. Even when they do, they sometimes do this based on assumptions, such as skin colour and stereotypes.”

“I feel that culture is easy to respect but not easy to support.”

Young people articulated their need of a care system that fosters a deeper connection to their own cultural heritage and includes diverse representation.

“...It’s hard to find someone from a similar ethnicity, which will be great if we do. Having connections and relationships with them, not even like mentorship, but talking to them is important to feel connected.”

“A lot of cultural learning happens during your time within the community or group story sharing.”

“Happy to see a diverse representation in the sector. I was happy when I saw you [referring to one of CREATE’s staff] at CREATE, as I thought the sector was always mainly formed by white people.”



Tasmania

Lived experience insights from children and young people with care experience, 2024-2025

Between July 2024 and June 2025 there were 11 Youth Advisory Groups held in Northern Territory.

56 young people attended these sessions to share their insights and lived experiences.

Are you listening?



Tasmania

Who we heard from

Between July 2024 and June 2025, CREATE Foundation facilitated 11 Youth Advisory Group sessions across Tasmania. Four of these sessions were face-to-face, held in Hobart, and seven were delivered online for greater reach, state-wide. 56 young people attended these sessions to share their insights and experiences.

Key themes and insights

During the Youth Advisory Groups, young people shared their experiences and their insights into:

- The importance of being in relationship with others, particularly their carers, Child Safety Officers (CSO) and their peers
- The capacity building needed in schools to better understand and respond to the experiences of children and young people living in out-of-home care (OOHC)
- What is working well with the care system and what improvements are needed
- The function and role of the proposed Tasmanian Commission for Children and Young People
- Mental Health Service for Children and Young people in Out of Home Care
- Transition to independence
- Sortli App
- Meaningful Conversations with Carers and Child Safety Officers
- Charter of Rights for Tasmanian Children and Young people in Out of Home Care
- Child Protection Week 2025

“Every Conversation Matters”

“Conversations help young people build trust. A trusting relationship means young people will be more likely to reach out when they need help.”

“Every Conversation Matters” was the theme of Child Protection Week 2024. The theme promoted conversation at the Youth Advisory Group about the need for children and young people (CYP) living in OOHC to have people in their lives they can talk to. At the Youth Advisory Group, young people spoke about the importance of their relationships with their carers, CSOs and their peers.

“Conversations with young people can help them feel valued and as though their opinion matters.”

Young people shared insights into why the conversations they have with these important people in their lives matter. The young people spoke about how trust needs to be at the heart of these relationships to make genuine conversations that make a difference in their lives.

They felt that genuine conversations with their carers, CSOs and peers’ matter to them for several reasons. The conversations contribute to their safety, security and wellbeing, they help them to feel like their voice matters, and they help to shape their identity. The young people shared:

- trusting relationships make it more likely that a child or young person will reach out when they need help
- conversations with people they trust helps a children and young people to feel they are listened to, valued, and that their opinions matter
- trusting relationships create space for disclosure of information that can be vital to their safety and wellbeing
- conversations help children and young people develop confidence and their communication skills.

Reflecting specifically on each relationship, young people shared conversations that matter.

Conversations with carers:

- are opportunities for a carer to be a role model and a parent figure
- help a young person to feel to safe within the home.

“Good communication can help them work with the young person to help them feel safe and comfortable in the home.”

“They are the adult role model who can act as the parent figure.”

Conversations with Child Safety Officers (CSOs):

“The CSO could learn something really important that could help with their [young person’s] safety and planning.”

- can help a children and young people to understand why they are in care
- informs a young people about their care plan and involve them in creating their care plan with what “matters” most: their safety, security, wellbeing, development and opportunities.

“Conversations are an opportunity for disclosures to happen in a safe space. Opportunities for disclosing information is vital.”

“So, the young people can have updates on what’s happening with their care arrangements.”

Conversations with peers:

- can be a protective factor for a young person’s mental health
- can help young people to be able to identify what a “normal home life” is like and what it is not like
- allow a young person to share things with people who can just listen
- can help a young person to develop their own opinions and shape their sense of self and identity.

“Building relationships with peers and making friendships can lower the chances of suicide. Your peers can give you support.”

“Conversations with peers can help reduce stigma about kids in care.”

“Sometimes it’s easier to open up to peers about home life. By opening up to peers you can understand what’s normal or not.”

“You’re not looking to peers as an authority figure. Their opinion can be very valuable to help shape your own thoughts.”

The rich conversation led the young people to produce an art piece inspired by the topic of conversations that matter, to promote Child Protection Week 2024.



Image: “Conversations that Matter” CREATE Foundation Youth Advisory Group Artwork, 2024

Capacity building in schools

"I think that schools, when it comes to out-of-home care, need to be more informed about what it is and the challenges that we face, which are unique and different to children and young people who live with their parents."

"I wasn't very protected in a sense when I was in those primary years. I think I was about six or seven... those formative years where I needed to be most protected from the bullies."

"...in my in my genetics class, when we were learning about how traits are passed down, we were asked, 'hey, go ask your mum, go ask her dad, look at them.' That kind of thing. I'm like well, I don't live with my family. I can't ask them those questions. You know, sometimes young people don't have contact with their biological family, so even in little ways like that young people can feel isolated or like triggered by topics."

Like all children and young people, those living in OOHC spend a lot of time in education settings. Because of this, children and young people living in OOHC need an education environment, and relationships in their education environment, that keep them safe, provide them with opportunities for high-quality learning and attend to their wellbeing so they can thrive at school and beyond.

Young people spoke about the practices that could be developed in schools to better understand and respond to the experiences of children and young people living in OOHC. Young people expressed empathy for teachers, while also describing common experiences of exclusion as a result of their care arrangements.

"Forms... don't include carers, they just say parents, and then you can't get it signed cause they're not your parents. That was really annoying because you had to go to child protection and then they won't [sign] it until it's [the activity] over... I had an excursion that was short notice and they couldn't sign it in time, so I didn't go."

Young people shared:

- the importance of teachers better understanding the lived experience of children and young people living in OOHC, so they are able to better support these young people at schools
- building teachers' capacity to support inclusion of those living in OOHC, including:
- the importance of protecting kids living in OOHC from bullying
- the ways that those living in OOHC can be stigmatised by both adults and peers, and how this impacts negatively on their safety, inclusion and mental health
- their own practices of unconscious exclusion of children and young people in OOHC
- the importance of being trauma informed and upskilling in trauma informed practices in the classroom
- the unique challenges the children and young people face in relation to continuity of their learning and the importance of robust, personalised Learning Plans to ensure learning is kept on track, including when a young person is enrolled in a new school

- the importance of the child or young person being involved in the development and regular review of their personalised Learning Plan, to support personal agency and for relationship building.

“It would be helpful for teachers to be [trauma] aware and notice the signs if something is happening, both for kids who are in out-of-home care and for kids who are not, because you know, it's not only kids in out-of-home care who get traumatised.”

“I think it's really important for children and young people who are in care to have... learning plans because the way they learn, or the things that affect their learning are very different to a young person who is with their biological family.”

“[A] lot of time I was at school... the teacher and somehow everyone in the class knew that my case worker was here or picking me up and I was like ‘how do you even know that?’ So, I just think, confidentiality needs to be prioritised.”

“Individual Learning plans need to be 100% confidential... to make sure one hundred percent that's not shared information.”

The young people also proposed ways teachers' capacities in these areas could be supported and developed.

“Professional learning workshops on broader understandings of OOHC provision, the stigmatisation of children and young people living in care, how it can manifest as bullying and its impact on their wellbeing, and on how to recognise unconscious exclusion of children and young people living in OOHC in school activities and classroom learning.”

“[There could be] anti stigma school workshops potentially, I think that would be quite good for both teachers and students.”

“...not necessarily sharing any information so much, but proving things false. You know, like the idea that young people in care are more likely to be criminals or be at risk [and] require being treated like you've done something wrong.”

What is working well with the care system and what's not

Children and young people living in OOHC have unique insights into the systems they are in contact with. As such, young people engaged in a Youth Advisory Group conversation about what they feel working for their best interests in the Tasmanian care system, and the system improvements they want.

Things working well:

- transport assistance for young people and carers to attend fun, recreational activities and important appointments and events
- CSOs including them in conversations about matters important to them and asking about their wishes
- having consistent respite carers who young people know, for their safety and security.

Things that could be improved:

- CSOs could visit young people more often and have more conversations with them
- all CSOs could write down what young people tell them so they don't forget
- Children and young people should be included in decisions that impact them.

Commission for Children and Young People Draft Bill

CREATE collaborated with the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC) to consult children and young people living in OOHC about the Commission for Children and Young People Draft Bill in November 2024. The Bill proposed the establishment of a new Tasmanian Commission for Children and Young People. Young people shared their views about the functions of the proposed Commission and in particular its:

- role in keeping children and young people living in OOHC safe
- role in advocating for children and young people living in OOHC
- obligations to young people with respect to confidentiality and how privacy protection should be practiced
- independence from Government;

Young people also spoke about the role of young people in recruiting the new Commission's staff.

Young people recommended that the proposed Commission assist with individual advocacy:

"[Young people in OOHC] are supposed to have a Child Safety Officer, but if they are not listening to the child [the Commission could] have someone those kids can reach out to and say, 'hey something's not working.'" – Young people

"We've already got trauma. Any little things can become more traumatic and I think young people need to be listened to a little bit more and [have their concerns] acted upon."

Young people also thought the new Commission should:

- have oversight of the policies and processes of the Department of Education, Children and Young People in keeping children and young people living in OOHC safe, to ensure they are effective
- have the authority to conduct unscheduled home visits when a notification is received that a child or young person is unsafe in their placement
- ensure young people are listened to and have mechanisms in place that encourage and support this
- implement a specific role within the Commission to be responsible for assisting and supporting those living in OOHC with concerns and complaints

- have the central function of listening to children and young people living in OOHC, act on their concerns and elevate their voices
- provide access to support options that young people are aware of and supported to access, such as an online chat

The young people made clear that confidentiality was of paramount importance to them. They did recognise that decisions made about the use of young people's private information needed to consider their best interests. There may be situations where sharing confidential information is in a child's best interests. However, the young people were clear that children and young people should always be asked for permission before their private information is shared, and they should be supported to understand how the sharing of their information will benefit them.

"I think you should always ask before sharing any sort of like private information. I'd like someone [who says] 'I see you, I understand you, would you like me to act on it and also escalate it?' type thing."

"I think yes, it's polite for whoever needs to report to ask the young person first, but at the end of the day, somebody's [potentially] getting assaulted. That child is going to say no [to information sharing] because they are terrified. They need an adult to advocate for them. I mean, you've also got to think you're talking to traumatised children."

The young people also strongly believed the proposed Commission should be independent from Government. Their reasons for wanting this included that this would allow for greater, unbiased oversight of Child Safety and would allow for young people's voices to be heard independently from Child Safety. The Commission will also provide young people with someone to talk to when they do not feel comfortable talking to their CSO, or if their CSO is unavailable.

"I always felt wrong telling another worker that my worker wasn't how I wanted them to be. I definitely think young people will find it a little bit easier to actually talk (to an independent Commission)."

Young people also observed it would be important for the Commission to be well promoted amongst children and young people living in OOHC, and easily accessible to them. Young people saw a clear and important role for those with a care experience in the recruitment of roles within the Commission. The function of the Commission is to advocate for and provide service to children and young people. Young people with lived experience can have particular priorities to others involved in recruiting staff. It is important that young people's views on the qualities needed in staff members are listened to and considered for the Commission to be effective.

"I think it would be really cool to create a little board system where you've got multiple young people with diverse backgrounds. That way you get a bit of everyone's opinion. You would need like varied ages genders all that sort of stuff."

"That way young people can also turn around and go, nope, sorry, I want somebody else. If you're all the same types of people [involved in recruitment], or they are all being picked by the one person, then I feel like the diversity will not be there as much."

"I feel like adults sometimes look at degrees and young people, we look at like personalities, you know, if we get really well."

DPAC will use these insights collected from young people at the Youth Advisory Groups to inform the Bill development.

Mental Health Service for Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care

In partnership with the Department of Health, young people reflected on a proposed Child and Youth Mental Health Service for Children and young people in out-of-home care. The young people shared their thoughts on how engagement, access, usefulness, relevance and responsiveness could be strengthened as the service expands and evolves throughout Tasmania. They believed that for this program to run successfully, there needed to be promotion and exposure in spaces that young people continuously have access to such as schools, CREATE and other agencies, and that this program information, among other online promotional services, needs to be provided to Carers, Case Workers, and other children and young people for engagement purposes.

"I feel like a good place to start, in terms of promoting to young people, would be in the spaces that they are consistently in. So, places like schools, CREATE, [other agencies]. Particularly if it is directed at young people from out-of-home care."

"When the program begins, all case workers should be informed about it... It should become a part of case worker training, so they can tell Carers about it and it can get passed on to children and young people, like word of mouth."

The young people conveyed their thoughts on the importance of having all of the information in one place, referral pathways on the website, and clarity around the hours of the service. Additionally, there should be out of hours numbers provided that can be accessed for young people to call and ask for help if the service is not available 24/7.

"It is important to have [all the] information in one place, like, what [are the] run times of the program? Is it after hours? Is it a 24-hour service?"

"If the plan is to only work from 9am to 5pm or whatever, make sure to add out of hours numbers that people can click on and access."

Young people contributed their ideas and lived experiences to support what they feel is needed for this program to be useful, relevant and responsive.

"[What] I hope to see implemented in this program, is practitioners who have had experience [knowledge] of the out-of-home care system and what young people might have to deal with. I think this is something that's really important for this service to have."

"Something, I don't think is talked about enough, when it comes to mental health services, especially for kids in out-of-home care, is the trust that comes with it. One of the reasons I myself didn't reach

out to mental health organisations, is because I'm unsure if they're going to help. I was unsure if they're going to just blab to my workers, it's a whole confidentiality thing."

"I'm wary of the idea that you have to be on a court order. I know, for me it took me two years to get put on a court order. I definitely could have used this kind of intensive, specialised support when I was transitioning from my biological mum into out-of-home care. That was an incredibly rough time for both me and my sister."

Other ideas shared that young people believe should be implemented in this program include:

- Child Safety Officers and Carers should be given the tools to recognise when a young person may need mental health services to support access as early as possible
- Young people need to be provided with education and understanding of their own mental health along with the Carer and Care Team.
- All clinicians should be trauma-informed
- Further education around trauma being separate from mental health as these are often misunderstood as the same
- Mental health support should be provided and is crucial when young people are going through changes, such as changing placements, coming into care or transitioning out of care
- Siblings should have the option to have appointments together as they are each other's support and can work through issues together

Young people openly voiced the considerations that are important for the Department of Health to recognise when working in partnerships with Carers and the Care team, highlighting belief that both the service and the young person should have access to the young person's file.

"I know young people's files don't always accurately reflect a young person, but I feel like it would be good for the service to have access to young people's files beforehand, so they have a general idea of the young person's story."

"I think having the young person go through and have a look at their file prior to handing it over to someone. That way they can go yep, I agree with the information being handed on."

Young people shared their views of what makes a 'safe' and 'trustworthy' service from the perspective of an out-of-home care child.

"One thing is cultural safety. So, I think young people might feel more safe in a place where they can see their culture represented."

"I think it's handy to have food available, and comfortable spaces, so like beanbags and things – especially if they're coming in after school or something, they're probably hungry and tired."

"The first couple sessions you might be able to play a card game together, get to know each other before getting into sometimes really traumatic stuff for the young person."

There was further insight from the young people that highlighted the importance of the space and environment having the following inclusions:

- Young person friendly with resources such as blocks, books, fidget toys, and cards
- Comfortable and relaxing, with access to items such as beanbags
- Artwork, murals or things on the walls to make it look less clinical
- Representation of different cultures, demonstrating cultural safety
- Posters that advocate for the LGBTQIA+ community, respecting pronouns and identity
- Windows that you can see out of but that aren't inside the internal walls of the building for conflict of privacy for others to see through
- Rooms set up so that the young person is closest to the door/exit to feel more comfortable
- Other considerations that young people shared to support safety and trust included:
 - Building relationships with therapists before talking about traumatic instances
 - Ensuring the young person has an in depth understanding of the consent form and process
 - Access to translators for those who need
 - Awareness and conversation surrounding the confidentiality that Healthcare Professionals are required to maintain by law, with the exception of an individual who may harm themselves or others
 - Having friendly reception or greeting staff to support a young person feeling welcome
 - Helping professionals could wear casual clothes as it is a space for children

When young people were asked to imagine the program in place and effectively supporting children and young people in care, they believed the service should include and consider trauma informed therapists that are specifically trained and skilled in working with out-of-home care children, a staggered discharge to the service, and agency for the young person to choose their helping professional.

"I think that a lot of therapists are trauma informed, but if you're talking specifically to kids in out of home care there is a level of care that needs to be given there, perhaps on a higher level. The training for people who are working there needs to be in more in-depth [and specific to out-of-home care], in the same way that we give case workers and foster carers training. Specifically, how to talk to children in out-of-home care."

"I know I've seen a psychologist and both times it's ended the same way. I get better and don't make any more appointments, then I don't hear from them at all. So maybe following up with young people a month after, three months after and six months after. Also giving them the tools to keep on top of their mental health."

"100% agree with a staggered discharge. My other concern is with larger mental health services, a lot of people really fall through the cracks. That can be said for a lot of different services, but particularly people who have come from a crisis situation where they've gone from suicidal to okay,

then are potentially discharged. It's really important to maintain check in's to make sure that they're not spiralling back down."

"It would be good if the young person can choose the gender of the person that they're working with, in case there's been things that have happened to them in the past that makes them feel uncomfortable with adults of a certain gender."

Young people also expressed thoughts that the Department of Health should:

- Have a name for the program that is appealing to younger people and children
- Provide consistent Clinicians for the purpose of safety, trust and rapport building
- Consider having the option of two Clinicians/Therapists if there isn't a possibility of one, share information with both of these helping professionals (with young person's consent) to avoid the young person having to explain their story or disclose information twice
- Have a complaints and feedback process for young people that is easily accessible and confidential
- Give the young person some of the choice in who they want to talk to
- Provide remote options for people in urban settings, good parking for those who are driving, accessibility options for those with different mobility needs, and ensure that the service is somewhere close to public transport for those who use public transport

Transition to Independence

With direct reference to life skills, housing and finance, young people shared their insights into some of the challenges they have faced during transition to independence from out-of-home care.

"[Young people need to know] life skills, even something as simple as how to cook, how to put on a load of washing, how to get stains out of your clothes, how to look after our house and how to clean."

"Teach young people how to cook, to clean and how to go grocery shopping... I found when I moved out, the stuff wasn't just in the cupboard [anymore]. I knew what to use to clean the bathroom, do the washing, and all that, but the products were always in the cupboard before. So, I had to go to the grocery store and I had all these options of the exact same product. I'm thinking, does the cheap stuff work?... if you show me how to clean the bathroom and what product to use, well, I'll just buy that product from then on."

"[Young People would benefit from] someone showing them how to apply for a private rental and understanding a private rental system, or how to show up at an inspection."

Young people also expressed their thoughts and what it feels like to transition to independence at the age of 18, voicing that the age of transition should be raised to 25 in Tasmania for young people in out-of-home care.

"I feel like 18 is too young to move out, or to be forced to [move out]. Kids or people outside of care, aren't moving out till like their 20s... or 30's. [If] we were able to raise the age to 25... I just feel like the age [of transition] needs more work."

"... that's how we slide through the cracks. We become homeless, we reach out to other things that aren't so great for us, or we pursue different things that maybe we shouldn't. I feel like at that sort of age you are going through... the most changes in your body and your mind, and then [there is] the expectation to move out."

"I think everyone I've spoken to says [moving out] is really stressful and it's a really big thing. But I feel like... you should be able to enjoy your 18th birthday, like, you shouldn't be worrying about where you're sleeping on your 18th."

"If [young people] are leaving care, I don't even know how they do it in this economy with the cost of living and everything. I can barely afford life, I don't know how an 18-year-old is going to afford life, I remember at 18 I was [earning] nothing. I'm not too sure what [Child Safety] are doing around that, but [it is] probably something that needs work."

Focussing on the exposure and accessibility of programs, young people shared their insights relevant to how independence programs can only support young people when young people are given the information to access them, and what would be beneficial for young people as they transition to independence.

"I just thought that the day I turned 18, my birthday present would be bye-bye, and it wasn't explained that there'd be support once I turned 18."

"I didn't feel prepared... I was scared and didn't want to talk about it [the conversation around transitioning to independence]."

"The Transition to Independence Program [T2i] helped me quite a lot. They also helped me fill out the forms to get that After Care Support funding."

"I had someone help me fill out the forms... that was helpful."

"I didn't find out [about After Care Support] until I needed to come down for surgery, and I didn't have the money... I tried to Google it and there wasn't much, but once I got the information through email, it was easy... all the information's on that flyer... why is this flyer not used out in the public."

"They [Child Safety] ... took over a year to contact me about the \$2500 [After Care Support] ... there was like no contact before that, until two weeks before I had to use the money up, or it was gonna go."

"It took the Department [Child Safety] until after I was 18 to contact me."

With affirmations that the After-Care Support Program and Transition to Independence (T2i) are each valuable and supportive, young people conversed their lived experiences to provide an understanding of what additions would assist these programs for a better outcome and further exposure for out-of-home care children as they transition to independence.

"I don't wanna say that they're doing a bad job because they're doing what they can, but there are definitely areas that [need] work... I've already got a lot of the resources, they just aren't being used, so you know, if people or if workers are aware of these resources, it could just be an educational issue."

"I think having a dedicated, like, team or person within the Department [Child Safety] ... a specific team or person that is going to walk you through your transition plan and also a dedicated place where all of these resources are together. [Someone to let you know] This resource is how you get in contact with this resource and this is the form you have to fill out for this."

"Starting that transition program, or even getting some idea [of the program and funding] at 16 or 17 years old. Like, where would you like to live? What would you like to do?... getting them [young person] informed, but also starting that transition program [early], so that people are aware of it."

"[Carers could say] 'OK, when you get to 18, we are no longer able to care for you, but here are the abilities you will need to take care of yourself.'"

Young people had further insight on how Child Safety Officers can assist when transitioning to independence from out-of-home care.

"I think structure is key... I think if [there is] a structure and everyone follows it, then no one's confused."

"I think having the young person's input is crucial if they're transitioning."

"If a carer can't [teach young people life skills], finding another workplace that could offer alternatives, or a support worker or caseworkers can do that."

"You can go to community houses and they've got kitchens that you can use and rent out... and obviously it'd only work if the case worker and the child had a good relationship as well. Maybe the caseworker rents out the kitchen for an hour, and part of that is going to the shops, getting [things to cook]."

"Maybe you can make an app, that when you download it, you unlock certain levels when you age. So, you know, a 10-year-old doesn't need to know about getting a couch. That could be a fun little way of every year, every birthday young people get another section of the app. So that then when they turn 18, they've got this entire thing and they can refer back to it."

"I got a booklet when I was a teenager, it was call 'All About Me'. At the back [it had] the things that you'll do when you transition. So, like getting passports, getting a birth certificate, making sure that you have your own medical [information]... It was like 2 pages of all these things that you should get sorted and things that you should buy [for when you transition]. Then there was a little section where you could also write your things. I guess the idea was to take them off over the years so that by the time you were 18, you had them all done, but it never happened. It would be good if it was used."

Sortli App

Young people aged 18 and above, gathered to express their thoughts and provide feedback on the production and implementation of the Sortli App for Tasmania. This is a free mobile application developed by CREATE designed by youth for youth, aimed at providing advice to navigate transition

to independence. Young people shared what they would have found helpful when they were transitioning to independence, and what would be helpful now, to make the Sortli App more relevant and useful for out-of-home care children and youth.

Young people shared important inclusions of relevant information to consider for physical and mental health. Information gathered directly from young people supported the idea of an informative guide to health that includes nutrition, hygiene, sexual health, menstruation health, recipes and cooking advice, available general practitioners and support services that can be accessed without an adult's permission or that will not have to disclose everything the young person says.

"I couldn't get the right medication for my acne because my carer wouldn't agree."

"I didn't have good understanding of hygiene, because I learnt about it through my friends."

"I didn't know anything about cooking until I had to cook for myself."

"My psychologist was organised by the department, so they reported back to them, and it didn't feel safe to tell the psychologist things."

Young people's lived experience of challenges they faced during transition to independence supported the addition of a guide to manage financial responsibilities, an education and training guide, and an employment guide. Young people expressed their concerns that if they do not have the support and understanding to navigate these life skills it can impact their transition negatively.

"My carer didn't teach me how to budget."

"I had to learn the hard way that there is always a cost, with things like Afterpay, that young people don't always understand."

"I didn't know what a credit score was and how it could affect me when I want to rent a house."

"Young people in out-of-home-care don't always have support from family, so further education is often harder."

"I didn't even know how to write a resume, and it stopped me from getting a job."

"I am often told I am overqualified for a job when I apply and don't get it, but it feels like stigma."

Young people provided their insights into the issues out-of-home care children can face in transitioning to independence regarding housing. The information that young people have expressed they need in the Sortli App include cleaning advice, how to rent a house, how to be a considerate housemate, and access to a strong support system as relationship breakdowns can put a young person at risk of homelessness.

"I didn't know how to clean my house and what cleaning products to buy when I left care."

"I had to work through a hard situation with my carer when I transitioned to independence and almost ended up homeless."

Young people articulated their need for knowledge and support in understanding their legal rights as well as the desire to access full, unredacted information and any documentation that is theirs from their time in out-of-home-care.

“Young people have people [carers, Child Safety, Youth Workers, residential housing workers] go through their things. We don’t always know if this is legal.”

“I wish I had access to a lawyer when I was in care, to know if what happened was legal.”

“I requested case notes from [agency] and I wasn’t provided anything. All I got were a few legal documents, after 18 years in care.”

“I have the right to pursue what happened to me in care, but I don’t have any of the documents.”

“I have a right to know what happened to me in care, the redacted information protects the wrong people.”

Information on how to recognise unsafe relationships, how to have successful professional relationships, a glossary of relations terms, information and support for abusive relationships, cybersafety, grooming, and access to community support pages were all mentioned as ideas to add into CREATE’s Sortli App during the discussion on personal and community relationships. Young people voiced that a well-developed understanding of safety and healthy relationships and positive relationship role models are vital for young people, and that poor experiences in personal relationships can increase distrust and stigma as well as vulnerability to grooming and exploitation.

“Young people often have misguided ideas of safety and relationships.”

“Young people in care don’t always have positive role models in relationships.”

“You can be more susceptible to grooming if you have been in care and not had a good experience or support.”

“Mistrust in carers or workers can lead to mistrust in all relationships.”

“Young people [who have an out-of-home-care experience] don’t always trust the police or legal system, due to how other people perceive situations.”

Meaningful Conversations

Young people shared lived experience in having regular, meaningful conversations with Carers and Child Safety officers. Insight into meaningful conversations for a young person in out-of-home care highlighted the importance of feeling comfortable, regular check-ins and active follow ups.

“One of my carers used to ask me after school how our day had been, and also, if there was anything they could help me with. If I was struggling with something they would help me and talk to my worker about it as well. It was amazing that they were able to do it almost every day, because we would just have a chat about it. If there was anything needed, they would just go straight to my worker for me.”

“I think it’s very important for the young person to feel comfortable. If you’re living with a carer and they’re not taking the time to get to know you, then it’s not going to work out.”

When thinking about meaningful conversations, young people shared their need for direct input into decisions about their life and expressed that if they not feel comfortable to talk about issues, or are not provided with opportunities to do so, it can make things worse and impact their health.

"[Young people are] the ones experiencing it firsthand, so obviously their advocacy matters and the decisions that are being made are going to impact them specifically, so you have to have their input."

"There could be an issue going on and if it's not brought up, it can get worse. If they [young person] don't feel comfortable enough or don't even have the opportunity to talk about it, it can affect their mental health."

Young people seek increased accountability and regular conversations with Carers, Child Safety Officer's and other organisations, advocating for further understanding that there can be barriers for young people to talk about their concerns. Young people have suggested the inclusion of further training for Carers, and the importance of building and maintaining a trusting relationship.

"I think there needs to be increased accountability for groups [organisations] that are running their team meetings and things like that. I think it should basically be mandatory at this stage for all organisations to be regularly meeting with a panel of young people to make sure they're doing things right."

"It's not always easy for a young person to talk about something that's going on with them."

"I think that you guys [CREATE] should implement some of the things you've got in your case worker training into carer training. Like the empowering advocacy sort of stuff, I think that's important."

"With workers [Child Safety officers] making the young person feel comfortable to be able to talk to them. So, like, visiting them regularly and getting to know them to a point where the young person feels like they can actually tell them stuff."

Charter of Rights

Young people shared their insights from an out-of-home-care perspective on the first three rights of the Charter of Rights for Children and Young People. When reflecting on the first right 'I have the right to be safe and feel safe' young people expressed their desire in needing to feel welcome in the home and be reassured that they will not be harmed as well as the importance for regular conversations with Carers and Child Safety Officers, and reflective up-to-date case and care plans.

"Make sure they [young person] feel welcome and they know you're [the carer is] not going to do anything to hurt them."

"[The case and care plan] gives an idea of what that person's going through at that stage, so if they are moved to a home then hopefully that carer can provide that feeling of safety."

"Having regular discussions, so if the person like doesn't feel safe, they can chat to child safety and their carer and work something out."

Referring to the right to be safe and feel safe, young people believe that communication via email is not sustainable and it would be useful to have options for communication with Child Safety. They shared thoughts on how they think this implementation could be utilised for maximum benefits when considering a child or young person in out-of-home-care.

"Personally, my caseworker was like 'if you have any issues, email'. But I can image how many emails she had... It was a lot of effort on my part... I feel like if we're [young people] going through a situation that's not necessarily going to be what you want to do is to sit there and e-mail them. I also feel like e-mail is very like professional, like I struggled to write back."

"I feel like they [Child Safety] could open up more ways of communication. Because I could feel unsafe in one instance and just want to message a number or you know, something to let that person know."

"Maybe if there was a messaging thing where you can message your caseworker, then they would get that message in the morning and they could call and say, 'hey, what's going on?' That way you're not saying it to your case worker, like two months later when it was probably really important to you, or something really bad happened at that moment and either you've forgotten what happened, you don't want to talk about it, or it's just irrelevant at that time."

"[Child Safety] could just create like a whole other team of informed trauma people that listen and all that sort of stuff. I wouldn't imagine these people are in the young people's lives 24/7, one-on-one basis. I feel like this service would be known out there in the Foster Care world as just if you need something immediately."

"I think bringing awareness of how important it [healthcare] is, because as a young one I couldn't care about my health and now I'm dealing with it."

Reflection on the second right, 'I have the right to receive health care when it is needed', offered a valuable discussion where young people shared lived experiences relative to Healthcare in the Education System, record keeping, and mental health needs specific to trauma.

"My school does vaccinations for two different things. So, it's good that schools do that."

"If you come into care at a young age, making sure that all your health stuff is still being followed through [is important]."

"[Mental health supports] needs to be improved, honestly, just in general... We [young people] are wonderful, we're lovely people, but we do have trauma, no matter what's happened, we've all had different amounts of trauma."

Young people responded to the third right 'I have the right to be consulted and listened to seriously about decisions that affect me' by offering their perspectives surrounding expectations, age appropriateness, ways of communication and interaction, as well as the need for clarity for young people and children to know that there are no repercussions for challenging ideas or bringing forward concerns during their involvement in decision making processes.

"Making it an expectation for them [young person] to be there, that inclusion... young people should be allowed to say what they want in those meetings."

"I think that [consultation is] important because carers can make decisions for you, but you know what's best for you and what you like and what you don't like."

"I think the main thing is making it [conversations] age appropriate because a six-year-old and a sixteen-year-old are going to have two very different ideas of their life and what is a realistic expectation."

"[Young people need to know that they will not get] punished for saying something. [Knowing] there's no repercussions if they want to bring up a concern that they have."

"I think [discussions with] the department is face to face only, I don't think they ever really reached the online. So, without sounding really rude to them, but like stepping up to the times and using the resources that we have and that we [young people] use, like, it's not like it's a foreign concept to us, like the internet and that, like it's our everyday."

Child Protection Week

The theme for Child Protection Week this year expands on that of last year, with the theme being "Every Conversation Matters; Shifting Conversation into Action". Young people expanded on last year's Child Protection Week discussions, along with brainstorming ideas for Child Protection week 2025.

"I think a video would be very, could be very, impactful because you can fit more information. Also, everyone engages with things differently, that [a video] could help with people that would see a poster or something, but not actually fully look into it. Whereas a video is constantly moving and it might catch [their attention]."

"I think art is very effective to portray stuff. I loved what you guys [CREATE Tasmania] did last year, so I think expanding on that would be good."

"... if it's an art piece you know, what's on there came from the young people."

Feedback for CREATE

Young people shared feedback that supports CREATE's priority and commitment to young people with an out-of-home care experiences, placing their voices as priority and ensuring that they are heard. CREATE facilitates programs that are safe, non-judgemental, and can act as a first point of contact if a young person has something to say. CREATE allows for young people's voices to be heard in a respectful way and young people have the choice to say no, or not provide their opinion. CREATE connects with Young People in multiple ways to ensure their voices are heard and their communication styles are met.

"I do think CREATE give a good youth voice, I've done a lot of stuff and I know a lot of other people who have done a lot of stuff with CREATE. I think this is like our first point of if we want to say anything. It's probably the easiest space to just say it and then go from there, it's a safe space."

"You guys [CREATE] do like a diversity of discussions. Sometimes it's in person, sometimes it's online, sometimes it's just a phone call or text message, like there's a lot of different variations to get the voices of young people."

"CREATE do it in a way that's like respectful to everyone."



Your invitation to listen

You are invited to listen, pause, reflect, and then act from your position of authority, power and influence over this system that shapes entire childhoods, and sometimes entire lives. The Youth Advisory Groups supported through CREATE Foundation have the following unique features.

Young people lead the topics and conversation

- Young people decide together what topics to discuss, and how
- Young people agree on how the discussion will happen, how it will be safe and supported

Young people 'own' the physical space where Youth Advisory Groups are held

- From first contact with out-of-home care, all children and young people are welcome at CREATE offices and programs throughout Australia. The spaces are child safe, decorated and set up for children and young people of all abilities and needs.
- Young people have long connection with CREATE Foundation, benefiting from a constant organisation and group of adults that supports and champions their voices in a safe and trauma-informed environment.

The conversations are about substance – every insight is shared to influence system change and improvement for other children and young people

- Only young people with care experiences are included in Youth Advisory Groups, there is no pre-requisite to attend, and the CREATE Foundation program facilitators make sure it is safe for everyone involved.
- With the exception of CREATE Foundation program facilitators, who often have long connection and trusted relationships with young people – adults are not invited.
- This means that young people can get to the heart of issues, and share without fear.
- When adults are invited, it's on 'young peoples terms' to support situations where the adults can share knowledge or skills – or are in a position of power and can act on what is shared with impact to benefit all children and young people living in out-of-home care.

Young people trust CREATE Foundation to share their voice with decision makers

- CREATE Foundation take verbatim records and notes, in real time, to ensure that the voices of children and young people are captured and shared, in their voice, to decision makers.

Young people rely on CREATE, as unconditional representatives

- CREATE Foundation has one reason for existing – to represent the voices of children and young people with lived experience in the out-of-home care system.
- Young people feel ownership of CREATE as their consumer body, and have a say around strategic and organisational direction, such as the development of the Strategic Plan 2024-2027; and continual refinement of participation and engagement methods.

Thank you

To every child and young person who made the decision to be a part of Youth Advisory Groups throughout the year, thank you.

To CREATE Foundation Program and Engagement Facilitators, who every day create safe spaces for children and young people with lived experience of out-of-home care to connect with each other and shape priorities, topics and methods, thank you.

To each department who continues to recognise the uniquely valuable space that only CREATE Foundation can provide, and who make available the most senior executives and influential decision makers to connect with children and young people who are in the care of the systems you steward, thank you.

‘This matters to us’

The topics in this report are broad ranging, and represent the diversity of the children and young people who attended throughout Australia this year.

Please respect the voices and lived experiences recorded in this report.

This report is developed and shared with the sole purpose of sharing insights and lived experiences with Ministers, Department heads, and sector leaders so that they can consider how to take actions that provide the best childhoods, teenage years and young adult experiences and opportunities for growth and development while being raised through the out-of-home care system.

Children and young people who attend Youth Advisory Groups at CREATE Foundation, ask and rely on CREATE to share these insights, to quote and reflect lived experiences into spaces and contexts where decisions are made about “us”.

If you would like to have the substance of this report reflected and presented to your team, or a conversation about what is in this report please contact the advocacy team at CREATE Foundation.

Contact CREATE Foundation

The advocacy team supports the delivery of the work program of the National Experience to Action Board (Youth) – NEABY.

Please contact advocacy@create.org.au.



Youth Advisory Groups

Are you listening?

From Naarm to Boorloo, Nipaluna to Garramilla, children and young people with care experience meet regularly in a safe and supported environment to talk about what matters most, to identify priority reform areas for child protection and care, and bravely share their insights with decision makers.