

Submission to the Victorian Parliament regarding the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025

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

Young person, Youth Advisory Group, 2025

*"Maintain connections to family, culture, and community. [Place young people] with kinship carers
wherever possible. Provide information, access, and support"*

Young person, Youth Advisory Group, 2025

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About CREATE Foundation

CREATE Foundation is the national consumer peak body for children and young people with an out-of-home care experience. We represent the voices of over 45,000 children and young people currently in care, and those who have transitioned from care, up to the age of 25. Our vision is that all children and young people with a care experience reach their full potential. Our mission is to create a better life for children and young people in care.

To do this we:

- **CONNECT** children and young people to each other, CREATE and their community to
- **EMPOWER** children and young people to build self-confidence, self-esteem, and skills that enable them to have a voice and be heard to
- **CHANGE** the systems impacting children and young people, in consultation with them, through advocacy to improve policies, practices and services and increase community awareness.

We achieve our mission by facilitating a variety of programs and services for children and young people with a statutory care experience and advocating for policy and systems change that will improve young people's experiences and outcomes.

For more information, see:

- CREATE's [Strategic Plan 2024-27](#), which outlines our strategic directions and goals.
- CREATE's [Menu of Programs](#), which outlines the range of programs, events and activities that CREATE runs.
- CREATE's [Menu of Consultations](#), which outlines our engagement, consultation and research offerings.



Introduction

CREATE Foundation is pleased to be invited to provide insights from children and young people with lived experience of out-of-home care to support the Victorian Parliament in its consideration of the *Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill, 2025* (the bill).

In this submission, CREATE is pleased to strongly advocate for the importance of connection to family and culture as a central principle for child protection legislation and practice.

This submission includes:

- **CREATE Foundation's response the amendments** which support improved connection to family and culture as part of Victoria's child protection system
- **Insights from children and young people with lived experience of out-of-home care** about their priorities and experiences of connection to family and culture while living in out-of-home care.
- **Additional considerations for the Victorian government to consider** as the legislation is implemented to respond to the insights and lived experiences of children and young people shared in this submission.

Young people have shared with CREATE over many years that connection to family and culture matters to them. It is central to their well-being, identity and sense of belonging. This includes not only maintaining connection to biological relatives but also broadening the definition of family where appropriate and recognizing the importance of stories, values, and relationships that allow young people to understand who they are and where they have come from. When supported and managed well, family connection can increase stability in the lives of children and young people growing up in out-of-home care. Such connection and the associated identity development can also support young people's overall health and well-being throughout their adulthood.

Young people shared with us the importance of:

- Supporting family relationships and meaningful contact as a priority that underpins decision-making and service delivery
- Supporting connection to culture
- Overcoming barriers that undermine family relationships and contact between family members
- Being led by young people in determining priorities for family contact and in defining 'family'
- Appropriately resourcing connection to family and culture

These points are emphasized through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989, arts. 3, 8, 9, & 30), which outlines the importance of protecting children's identity and connection to family and culture.

The information contained in this report is based on young people's perspectives shared with us through CREATE Foundation core programs and consultations. The insights shared strongly support the amendments and the intended improvements that will better respond to the attachment and developmental needs of children and young people.



CREATE Foundation's response to the amendments

The Victorian Parliament is considering changes to the [Children, Youth and Families Act \(2005\)](#) that seek to respond to years of advocacy and consultation, including the [Yoorrook Justice Commission](#) report on the consequences of elements of the act relating to adoption.

The changes detailed in the [Children, Youth and Families Amendment \(Stability\) Bill 2025](#), will separate adoption policy and legislation from child protection legislation—and appropriately distinguish and clarify the importance of family, kin, and culture within child protection practices. The [intention](#) of these changes is to improve immediate and lifelong outcomes for children. Key terms will be refreshed through the amendment, replacing the term 'permanency' with 'stability', including legal, physical, cultural, and relational stability. It introduces a more contemporary lens and definition of family, kin, and stability—reflecting advice and advocacy from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders, leaders, and communities, and recommendation 25 of the [Yoorrook for Justice Report](#).

CREATE Foundations welcomes these amendments and looks forward to working with the Victorian government to support improvements in outcomes for children and young people.

In particular, the CREATE Foundation strongly supports the:

- additional time, flexibility, and discretion will be provided to the Children's Court regarding Family Reunification Orders.
- consideration of the need for more time to put in place supports for families to enable safe and stable reunification and continuing kin relationships
- removal of adoption as part of the child protection response to addressing and resolving safety and well-being concerns of children
- introduction of a broadened and contemporary definition and application of stability, reflecting current understanding of child development, attachment, and relational needs—as well as the importance of family, community, and culture, as well as physical stability.

CREATE Foundation recommends that the Victorian Government:

- continues to engage with children and young people with lived experience of out-of-home care to support the implementation of the Act and the changes proposed.
- ensures that the family reunification process or any extension is accompanied by guaranteed, funded, and timely access to support services (counseling, housing support, etc.) to maximise chances of successful reunification and to make sure children are safe.
- ensures at each stage of case planning and as part of family reunification processes that meaningful and supported child consultation and child participation are prioritized throughout family reunification processes.
- ensures cultural stability and connection for every child, and prioritising kinship care and community connections, with priority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and their families and communities.
- ensures stable care options (kinship or foster care) are clearly defined and supported.
- emphasise relational stability for siblings in policy, practice and case management approaches—keeping siblings together, in relationship and connected wherever possible.
- consider how to increase accountability and outcomes measurement for each child's wellbeing, safety, and stability, which includes continual listening to the lived experiences and preferences of each child.
- include a principle of trauma-informed practice and embed processes for assessment, treatment, and healing that reflect the reality that children removed from their families—through no fault of their own—and placed in out-of-home care may continue to experience trauma.



Insights from children and young people with lived experience of out-of-home care

Supporting family relationships and meaningful contact as a priority that underpins decision making and service delivery.

Young people have consistently shared about the importance that family and cultural connection hold within their lives. They have shared that when carers and workers actively support family relationships, young people can experience greater stability, stronger placement bonds, and a healthier sense of identity.

“The consistent theme across placement experiences is the extent to which carers and residential workers actively facilitate or restrict opportunities for young people to engage with family and culture.

When carers prioritise family contact and demonstrate respect for cultural background, this often results in increased stability. They also develop a stronger identity of themselves and belonging within the placement. Positive experiences can include arranging regular visits, maintaining open communication with families and encourage participation in cultural events. These reduce feelings of isolation. [Child protection] does hold a critical role in this domain, both in setting expectations for carers and the monitoring powers that they hold”.

- Youth Advisory Group, 2025

Young people have also shared with CREATE the acute loss and disconnection that they can feel when they miss out on time with family members who are important to them, particularly at special times of the year such as birthdays and Christmas and significant holidays. Young people have also shared that it is important to maintain connection with a range of family members.

“Seeing my family is okay but I only get to see them for two hours and I want to see them more”

- Young person, CREATE consultation 2024

“Holidays still hurt a little bit. My birthday still hurts because I spent so many of them alone”

- Young person, Youth Advisory group 2024

“I only get to see Mum, but not the rest of my family”

- Young person, CREATE consultation 2024

It has been highlighted that young people’s desire to connect with family is not just about emotional ties and identity but about practical matters that include having an accurate and real-time understanding of medical issues that may be genetic.

“Your mother and father are diagnosed with all of this stuff, good chance you all will be diagnosed with this stuff. We will take the time out of our day to take care of you. Nobody picked up on the fact that I have scoliosis.”

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group, 2025



“We went behind [the department’s] back [with family contact] and it is the best thing my [foster] family ever did. As much as I didn’t meet my bio father until I was 17, having that previous history with mum, meant I knew my medical needs, family background.”

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group 2025

These accounts show that denying young people adequate contact with family not only harms identity and belonging but can directly impact their health.

Upholding the importance of sibling relationships

Siblings are often the most enduring and stabilising family connections in young people’s lives. Young people have shared with CREATE their belief that siblings should be placed together wherever possible and, when not, that sibling contact should be supported with the same level of priority as parental contact.

“I really don’t want other people trying to take away that connection between me and my brother.” -

Youth Advisory Group 2023

“They have no right keeping my siblings away from me.”

- Youth Advisory Group 2023

Similarly to other family relationships, young people expressed gratitude for foster carers who were seen to support and build a positive relationship with their siblings, including the willingness to take on the care of sibling groups.

“My foster family already had a relationship with my family —they had a really great relationship with my bio Mum and had taken in my older siblings. They essentially took in 2/3 of my family. They were phenomenal. They advocated so hard for us kids. They are still taking care of my two brothers. They have helped nurture them all the way up to high school graduation.”

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group 2024

Young people have shared that it is often their older siblings who can support them to connect with positive and safe extended family members.

“My person that connects me to my family is my big sister. She helps us all stay together, and it’s a really big role in our relationship.”

- Youth advisory group, 2024

“It’s a bit of a mess; for example, my younger siblings aren’t aware of the fact they have cousins, and they don’t know about our family history, and I feel like I’m the one that knows the most and knows more about my history than children services do. I tried to encourage my younger siblings to have connections to distant family. I want them to be able to have that support system that we older [ones] have]. You should believe what the kids say!”

- Youth Advisory Group 2025

This highlights the importance of a system and workforce that supports sibling contact in a timely and responsive manner.

“I keep trying to get in contact with my CSO about seeing my siblings, but she won’t return my calls.”

- Youth advisory group, 2024



“My youngest brother is still undergoing a transfer from [Child Protection] to his foster mum. The only time I could see him before all of that was with my bio mum, but I was having trouble with my bio mum at the time, so I couldn’t see him. Now I have to wait and see if his foster mum will let me see him.”

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group, 2024

Additional considerations

As part of considering the implementation of the amendments, CREATE Foundation advocates that care is taken to ensure that supporting family relationships and meaningful contact is a priority that underpins decision making and service delivery.

- 1. Kinship placements**—Prioritise kinship placements wherever safe and feasible to do so, with additional priority and resourcing in place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.
- 2. Sibling connection**—Ensuring that siblings are placed together wherever possible.
- 3. Robust and consistent family connection and attachment**—Where kinship and sibling placements are not possible, prioritise the creation and implementation of robust family contact plans to support safe family contact (supervised where necessary).
- 4. Listen and respond to the voices and wishes of young people**—Ensuring that family contact plans are created collaboratively alongside children and young people to ensure that the plans are meaningful and in line with their feelings and wishes.
- 5. Continual review processes**—Regularly review family contact plans to ensure that they are reflective of current circumstances and young people’s feelings and wishes.
- 6. Detailed documentation and accountability**—Ensuring that mechanisms are in place to document and report on family connection experiences and outcomes so that agencies, departments, and the Child Protection System can be held accountable.
- 7. Reform approaches to adoption models that result in erasure of family of origin and identity**—Review adoption in its current form, recognizing that it is not an appropriate model for children, their development, and sense of self due to the complete and lifelong severing of an individual’s connection to family, ancestors, and identity.



Supporting connection to culture

Young people from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background have shared that connection to culture is inseparable from connection to family. Many young people described the pain of being denied their cultural identity during the formative years of their life and sometimes not even being told about their heritage until adulthood. This represents a breach of the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to know and maintain connection to their identity, as protected under Article 8 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

"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 person, Youth Advisory Group, 2025

"I wasn't told I was Aboriginal until after I was 19... It was hard connecting to community and culture being in care."

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group, 2025

"I don't feel connected to my culture because I only found out when I was 18. So there are 18 years of my life I didn't have connection, and that makes a big difference."

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group, 2025

When barriers exist in relation to family contact for any reason, young people consistently called for access to elders, cultural mentors, and opportunities to learn language, lore, and traditions.

"I wish [Child Protection] would've taken me to an elder to learn about everything. Then I would've engaged more in cultural events."

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group, 2025

"I want to learn songs, art and craft, and language."

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group 2025

Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait young people have shared that it was through education and access to elders, cultural mentors within the community, and identified workers that they learned about positive aspects of their culture that had not previously been known to them.

"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"

- Youth Advisory Group, 2025

Young people also highlighted the important role that elders and community members can play in connecting with the country. The below quote demonstrates that cultural identity is not an abstract policy matter but an essential human need where children can experience longing, identity confusion, and cultural grief.

"I want to visit my country, but no one talks to me about it. I know I can't live there, but I want to go back."



Young people from a range of diverse cultural backgrounds have also spoken about the importance of connection to cultural mentors and creative ways that culture can be embraced, whether the young person is growing up in residential or foster care.

“It is about having access to someone who has that culture. Even if this is not possible, you could still integrate this into a house, however, e.g., On different nights, you could have different cuisines. There are lots of little ways that you can integrate culture into a household.”

- CREATE consultation, 2025

Additional considerations

As part of considering the implementation of the amendments, CREATE Foundation advocates that the Victorian Government continue to act and respond to the recommendations of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, including the following steps to establish and embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and self-determined models to ensure that there is a strong and continuing connection to Country and culture.

1. **Continue to prioritise full implementation and accountability for practice in accordance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles**—Work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations to refine and maintain accountability frameworks that ensure that practice does not deviate from the Child Placement Principles.
2. **Continue to transfer decision-making power about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organizations**—Ensure that partnerships exist with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations and other community members when decisions are being made about care models that relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.
3. **Transform culture and practice to ensure each child knows and is actively connected to their cultural heritage**—Ensure that cultural information that is held by the department is shared appropriately with children, young people and families in ways that are collaborative, build on and maintain cultural connections.
4. **Resource and sustain connection to Country and culture for each child and young person**—In addition to prioritising and supporting kin relationships, ensuring that through cultural plans, First Nations young people’s rights to connect with country, culture, lore, spiritual systems, protocols, practices, language and community are protected. That is, outline how language, community contact, rituals and cultural learning will occur.
5. **Establish accountability for establishing and sustaining connection and relationships between children and their communities and elders** - Support and facilitate models that assist young people to connect with elders and trusted mentors within the community.
6. **Deliver strong and focused accountability and outcomes monitoring**—Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations to refine and maintain accountability frameworks which ensure that cultural connection planning is occurring and being implemented in practice.
7. **Establish robust accountability reporting and transparency on cultural connection practices, delivery and outcomes** - Ensuring that agencies and departments are required to document and report on cultural connection experiences and outcomes (including, family contact, participation in community and culture, language) so that the system can be held accountable.



Overcoming barriers that undermine family relationships and contact between family members

Young people have described experiences and practices that undermined or distorted their family connection, cultural connection and identity, such as feeling pressured to refer to carers as “Mum” and “Dad” against their wishes or workers who devalue the importance of family connection.

“Forcing us kids to call them mum or dad”

- Young Person, Youth Advisory Group 2025

“People tell you things about your bio parents that aren’t necessarily true”

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group 2024

This highlights the importance of appropriate screening and training for prospective foster carers and workers.

Young people in foster care have shared that when carers instead supported and respected the significance of young people’s biological family relationships, this in fact served to strengthen the bond and stabilise placements. To this end, young people have also expressed their desire for their carers and workers to have more autonomy in facilitating and supporting family contact.

“That is what I loved about my foster parents. They buried my mother. Mum passed away and they took it out of their own money and savings, to pay for Mum’s funeral and cremation. They paid for us to all get necklaces with their ashes. [The department] didn’t do that”.

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group 2025

Young people highlighted the delicate balance that the Department needs to strike in allowing carers autonomy to support family contact in organic ways, whilst also maintaining a degree of oversight in ensuring that the principles of family contact are upheld and maintained in the young person’s best interest.

They should let the foster carers meet the biological family instead of it being managed my [case manager] supervising contact all of the time. [Child protection] don’t have to be supervising all visits. At the end of the day, there are some bio families that want to be a part of their kids lives. Give them the opportunity to have that connection.

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group 2025

In residential care, the barriers described in relation to family relationships and cultural connection were often more severe, with young people expressing that they felt that they had to fight for basic contact.

“They said I couldn’t see my Mum... If I hadn’t stood up for myself, I wouldn’t have been able to see her”

- Young person, CREATE consultation, 2024



“In Resi, workers need to be educated about the significance of the importance of cultural and family connection. Embedding family contact into case planning and review procedures. [The department] need to monitor when this is not being upheld. Education of young people on Human Rights. When cultural connection or family contact is not upheld this is a breach of Human Rights. This is a very consistent theme within residential care facilities”.

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group 2025

It has been expressed that barriers to family contact and other difficulties inherent growing up within residential care also act as barriers to family reunification and can result in young people self-placing with family, where regular and supported contact would be beneficial to their wellbeing and in some instances a safer option than being forced to make their own decision about whether to self-place with family.

“Reunification in a residential facility is quite rare to see. I have seen a lot of children who have self-placed as they’re so tired of waiting for [the department] to facilitate reunification. As humans, we are more inclined to go back to the people who we biologically came from even if that situation is unsafe. We are still inclined to go back to our biological kin”.

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group 2025

Practical barriers, such as geographical distance, can also undermine family contact. Young people have cited example of having to fund their own travel or else miss out on important family connection.

“I went down [... travel between different towns] for my brothers’ birthday and had to finance myself”

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group, 2024

“I haven’t seen or spoken to my Mum since I was 10. She lives in Melbourne”

- Youth Advisory Group, 2024.

Young people have shared that when geographic distance acts as a barrier, family contact is still vitally important and creative solutions can be found.

“It doesn’t where you are in Australia or overseas, you deserve to know who your family are what your culture is”

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group 2024

“Most of my family, we don’t get to connect [in person] often because of my situation. It’s good to be able to build that up online. I have been able to connect with family outside of Australia online. It’s fun because you get to build a bigger.”

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group 2024

Even in instances where there is risk inherent in family contact, young people urge carers and workers to listen to them and include them in safety planning, especially when they are in their teenage years and approaching adulthood. Safety planning and managing complex relationships and boundaries can be seen as a form of skill development.

“It gets annoying when you as the child knows more about your family history and why certain people are unsafe than [child protection]. It makes me think they’re incompetent”

Young person, Youth Advisory Group 2025.



Additional considerations

As part of considering the implementation of the amendments, CREATE Foundation advocates that substantial investment and workforce development is undertaken to overcome barriers that undermine family relationships and contact between family members.

1. **Address capacity and capability barriers** - Ensure that carers and workers alike receive comprehensive and regular training in the importance of family and cultural connection and its practical application. This should include the importance of centering young people's needs and feelings in contact decisions, collaborative practice such as including young people in risk assessment and safety planning (in age appropriate ways), and in creative ways of supporting family contact where barriers exist.
2. **Embed child-oriented communications about family that supports connection** - Reviewing and refining communication methods for keeping children and young people informed about their family members and what is happening in their lives, even when contact is not possible at a given time (such as where safety concerns exist).
3. **Support significant cultural change within the workforce to acknowledge family and culture as central to every child's wellbeing and development** - The provision of regular clinical supervision to workers with the goal of encouraging reflective practice around the importance of family and cultural connection, challenging biases and assumptions, and supporting young people to connect to their family and culture in meaningful and youth centered ways.
4. **Apply consistent practices and accountability for family and cultural connection across government and non-government providers of out-of-home care** - When service delivering is outsourced to non-government organisations, ensuring that the accountability mechanisms exist to ensure that the aforementioned training and clinical supervision standards apply to encourage high quality and consistent practice across the sector.
5. **Introduce comprehensive carer and worker screening to ensure child-safe attitudes and practices and understanding of family and culture, attachment and identity** - In the screening and assessment of carers and workers, ensuring that they understand the importance of family and cultural bonds.
6. **Establish supports that address needs, capability and capacity of carers to support connection to culture and family** - Ensuring that carers receive adequate support, including a safe space for reflection and feedback in a way that mirrors clinical supervision models for workers.
7. **Promote and enable regular connection to culture and family relationships** - Providing carers with more autonomy over practical decisions that impact family contact.



Being led by young people in determining priorities for family contact and in defining ‘family’

Young people report that sometimes professionals and carers can make assumptions about family contact and engage in planning that is not guided by young people’s feelings, wishes and desires which can often shift over time.

“Don’t force family connection down kids throats as that may make them disconnect more. It’s something that has to be built over time.”

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group 2025

Young people shared that sometimes the most important family relationships in their life sometimes aren’t with biological parents, but with other family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins.

“I call her mum but technically she’s my aunty. She’s my biggest influence in everything. She’s one of the biggest reasons in this world that I am where I am and I do what I do and am as open as helpful as I can be. It all comes down to her at the end of the day. Without her, I wouldn’t have the courage to speak up about important things.”

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group 2024

“Back when I left home and had nowhere else to go, my aunt and uncle took me in. That gave me a stepping stone. My aunt is someone I can rely on. I can have a conversation with her about whatever. Just the trust and connection with that is one of the biggest things for me.”

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group 2024

Young people have also shared that sometimes the most important and safe adults in their life are not biological family, but rather ‘chosen family’ which can include friends, mentors and carers. Being guided by young people in identifying and supporting access to these relationships in addition to biological family is central to supporting young people’s agency, empowerment and wellbeing. Sometimes, upon reaching adulthood young people may make their own choices about formalising such relationships, including through name changes. Others however, may prefer to retain their name and identity, but strengthen these trusting relationships in other informal ways.

“I have two big families. The first being my blood family, and the other is made up of support services that provide me with supports day to day. I also have my old foster family and have moved closer to them so I can see them more often.”

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group 2024

“I’m going through the process of changing my middle and last name because I don’t connect to my family. I have a pretty good chosen family and am changing my name to match with theirs. It’s a long process and costly but will be worth it”

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group 2024.

Some young people have shared how much they value keeping in contact former foster carers to support a sense of stability in their lives.



“Reaching out to a carer a few years later, I was like ‘I apologise’ [for a placement breakdown]. I thought it was me. She told me ‘it wasn’t you. This is because children’s services weren’t giving me enough support. She went to TAFE and worked in the sector because of me”. Her and I are best buds now.”

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group, 2025

I love my foster carers to absolute death and still call them my Mum and Dad. I go out to them for holidays every year.

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group 2024

For those growing up in residential care, peer relationships were seen as particularly important to support a sense of ‘normality’ and to provide access to additional safe adults and home like environments.

I feel that this is where a lot of young people are let down because they aren’t able to have ‘normal’ interactions with their peers. Peer friendships should be facilitated as much as possible”

- Young person, CREATE consultation 2025

“It’s good to encourage sleep overs with friends. Carers should ensure that they have the contact details of your friends 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 life environment’”

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group, 2025

It is also important to understand that for young people growing up in residential care who lack consistent, stable parent figures that workers can come to feel like ‘family’. Empathy, sensitivity and flexibility is required when introducing concepts such as ‘professional boundaries’ and managing worker turnover.

“I have a house manager. Instead of calling her the support lead, we call her the mother of the house. All the other workers are like Aunties and Uncles. We feel like one big family”

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group, 2024

“There are some carers in resi that you have connected with and when they leave it is really hard”.

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group, 2024

“If they perceive that you are close to a worker, they would move the worker to another house. What is wrong with having a connection – that shouldn’t be turned in to this situation where you lose that connection and learn not to trust people”

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group 2024



Additional considerations

As part of considering the implementation of the amendments, CREATE Foundation advocates that practices are established that promote and support listening and responding to the voices and perspectives of children in their care – so that carers and workers are being led by young people in determining priorities for family contact and in defining ‘family’.

1. **Strong and effective clinical supervision and practice models** - Ensure that previously mentioned clinical supervision models are implemented and support practice amongst carers and workers that encourage and allow young people to revisit their feelings and wishes around family contact over time, as they grow and mature in their understanding.
2. **Address broader systemic issues that limit relational care and connection** – Consider strategies that reduce high worker turnover and detached models of care. Establish workforce and models of care that assist young people to build strong and trusting relationships with workers that will aid them to share their feelings and needs honestly and to feel supported in this.
3. **Enhance training and development gaps** - Ensure that worker training encourages empathy, sensitivity and flexibility in navigating concepts such as professional boundaries and transitions when workers change.
4. **Embed relational models of care, that demonstrate safe, secure and caring relationships to children in care** - Develop models and arrangements that support young people to keep in contact with previous carers and workers in ways that are safe, supported and with appropriate oversight and safeguarding.
5. **Enable broad and diverse communities and care networks** - Conceptualise interdepartmental and interagency connections as a ‘care community’ who foster collaborative relationships to support children, young people and families.
6. **Address high levels of disruptions in circumstances** - Reducing placement breakdowns and moves wherever possible and appropriate.



Appropriately resourcing connection to family and culture

The insights shared by young people throughout this submission and emphasized further through the below quotes indicate a need for increased resourcing so that the recommendations outlined within this submission can be fully implemented. In particular, greater support is indicated in the areas of family tracing, cultural support and trauma-informed counselling and case work that helps young people to process the complexities that arise from disconnection to family and culture, subsequent contact and the rebuilding of identity.

“I was told I’m Aboriginal, then nothing. Why is it my job to search?”

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group 2023

“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 feel like I’m not Aboriginal enough as I’m white passing”

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group 2025

The above testimonies illustrate the need for proactive support that is comprehensive in nature and not only trauma informed but disability inclusive and culturally safe. Additionally, young people have highlighted that sometimes it was their biological parents who required holistic support to maintain consistent contact with their children.

“My Mum would promise that we’d see each other and the result was a letdown when my mother was not able to access the required support”

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group, 2024

As has been raised previously in this submission, young people have also articulated the need for greater financial and practical support in relation to family connection, such as where geographic distance is a barrier. The financial burden of reconnecting should not rest on the young person.

“I have 9 siblings but only half are in [regional town].”

- Young person, Youth Advisory Group 2023

Additional considerations

As part of considering the implementation of the amendments, CREATE Foundation advocates that steps are taken to enable and appropriately resource connection to family and culture, including measures that provide young people with safety, care and stability.

- 1. Designing staffing and workforce models that enable relational needs to be met** - Ensuring that residential care staffing models allow staff to adequately support young people’s family and cultural connection.
- 2. Implementing therapeutic support for young people** - Ensuring that therapeutic support is available to assist young people in managing complex experiences and feelings that may arise in relation to family and cultural connection.
- 3. Providing sustained and continual support for connection into adulthood** - Ensuring that adequate practical and emotional support is available to young people and those who have transitioned out of out of home care and in to adulthood to trace and reconnect with family and culture. This support should be life-long and culturally appropriate to those from an Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or other culturally diverse background.



Conclusion

As with all important decisions that affect their lives, the voices of children and young people must be heard and be central to how family and cultural connections are supported and maintained.

CREATE Foundation commends the Victorian Government for responding advocacy over many years to address the unintended consequences of permanency reforms through this amendment.

CREATE Foundation will continue to support and share insights from children and young people with lived experience of out-of-home care with the Victorian government to support continued improvement to legislation, practice and resourcing of child protection and out-of-home care.

CREATE welcomes the opportunity to work with Ministers in our advocacy that promotes the importance of connection to family and culture as a central principle for child protection legislation and practice in Victoria, and throughout Australia.

Thank you for your consideration of our submission including:

- **CREATE Foundation's response the amendments** which support improved connection to family and culture as part of Victoria's child protection system
- **Insights from children and young people with lived experience of out-of-home care** about their priorities and experiences of connection to family and culture while living in out-of-home care.
- **Additional considerations for the Victorian government to consider** as the legislation is implemented to respond to the insights and lived experiences of children and young people shared in this submission.

When family, sibling, kin and community relationships are resourced and supported through best practice interventions and approaches, they can profoundly assist rather than detract from the safety and stability of children and young people growing up in out-of-home care.

Should you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Nina Natasya, Advocacy Lead, Victoria on nina.natasya@create.org.au or the CREATE Foundation's Advocacy team at advocacy@create.org.au.