

CREATE Foundation National Office
Level 6, 280 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000
Tel 02 9267 1999 or 1800 655 105
www.create.org.au



MEDIA RELEASE

Friday 21 February 2014

SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN IN INSTITUTIONS NOT A THING OF THE PAST

CREATE Foundation Chief Executive, Ms Jacqui Reed, welcomes the decision by the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* to focus on a recent case of child sexual abuse in a Toowoomba primary school.

Ms Reed said the Royal Commission's attention to the 2007 Toowoomba case highlights the fact that child sexual abuse in institutional settings is not only historical. This issue remains a threat to the safety of children in our community today and external monitoring of the child protection system is imperative to assist in keeping children safe.

"Children and young people are being physically and sexually abuse in institutional settings right now," said Ms Reed.

"It is happening across Australia in out-of-home care including foster care, kinship care and residential facilities, in schools and other settings. CREATE believes the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse will be the only opportunity to effect real change in the child protection system into the future."

Case 6 of the Royal Commission focuses on a case at a Toowoomba catholic primary school where the principal, child protection officer and Catholic Education Office allowed a teacher to continue to abuse young children, under 12 years of age, for over a twelve month period after first being notified of the teacher's inappropriate dealings with a young Year 4 child attending the school.

Ms Reed said it is important to acknowledge the courage of that first young girl who told her parents, the Principal and child protection officer about the teacher's abuse.

"When nothing is done to protect children, especially when they have spoken up, it sends a terrible message to children that they will not be listened to or believed," said Ms Reed.

"Despite Catholic Education having protocols in place to deal with the situation, it appears that a systemic culture of cover up meant that the protocols were ignored."

Ms Reed said CREATE was also deeply concerned by a move away from independent oversight of the child protection system in a number of government jurisdictions in Australia.

The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child clearly articulates the right of children to have a voice. Yet what CREATE is seeing at a national and state level is a move away from independent

mechanisms that enable children and young people in out of home care to have their voices heard free from undue influence or repercussions.

CREATE Foundation is calling on all Australian governments and the Royal Commission to work towards a child protection system that is accountable, transparent and responsive to the needs of the children who, on a daily basis, live within this sometimes flawed system.

Ms Reed acknowledges that there are thousands of out-of-home care and other institutional providers where children and young people are safe and happy. CREATE Foundation's 2013 Report Card independently surveyed over 1,000 children and young people in care and revealed that 83% of respondents reported feeling "quite or very happy" in their current placement.

"It's the 17% we're concerned about," said Ms Reed. "CREATE asserts it is vital for our community and governments to understand that some of our most vulnerable children, who through no fault of their own are living in state care or other institutions, are being physically and sexually abused right now."

In Australia, over 39,000 children and young people live in out-of-home care (i.e. foster, residential, kinship care). Through no fault of their own, babies, children and young people are placed in care due to ongoing neglect or abuse.

Some young people in care experience social isolation, stigma and chronic low self-esteem. They feel unconnected, disempowered and unable to do anything about it.

CREATE Foundation is the peak body representing the voices of all children and young people in out-of-home care. CREATE Foundation relies on community support for its projects. Learn more at www.create.org.au

media enquiries Leigh White | 0431 932 122 | leigh@whitemarketing.com.au