



MEDIA RELEASE

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Inaugural *Strength to Strength* Conference Success Is the Way Forward

November, 2013, CREATE Foundation proudly held its inaugural international child protection conference in the nation's capital, Canberra. The *Strength to Strength* conference was attended by over 360 people, including 160 children and young people with an out-of-home care experience (i.e. foster, kinship or residential care), and also carers, government and sector representatives and both local and international child protection experts.

Unlike other conferences, *Strength to Strength* was designed to enable children and young people with a care experience to participate in the sharing of wisdom, when the true experts who have been cared for in the child protection system took part in delivering information sessions. One of the participants, West Australian Tash, (22), said *"The conference was awesome - I had a blast! It was great to meet so many people with similar experiences and it was amazing to hear what people thought could be improved to make the care system better for future generations."*

The inaugural conference was the culmination of twelve months' tireless work from the dedicated team at CREATE and the other supporters who made it all possible, said Ms Jacqui Reed, CREATE Chief Executive. *"Our conference was clearly unique, with a bold new model which brings the voices of children and young people to the fore. The feedback from young people and experts alike says it all!"*

"We were collectively overwhelmed by the show of support for our unique conference, with hundreds of attendees from all over the country and speakers from across the globe. Bring on October, 2015, when for the second time we will bring together the "who's who" of a strained sector, in an environment designed to engender respect and empowerment, as we learn from the past and work towards improving keeping children safe."

In Australia, over 38,000 children and young people live in care (i.e. foster, residential, kinship care) increasing by 9% every year. Through no fault of their own, children and young people may be placed in care due to neglect or abuse.

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

The only one of its kind in Australia, the conference provided a national forum for young people with a care experience to learn and grow, to connect with their peers, and those working within the system – and for their voice to be heard by professionals working in the field.

West Australian Chelsey (19) attended the conference and said, *“Strength to strength conference was a time for change, a time to reflect, a time for a new conversation. A conversation that will start a new beginning and change the way we talk or look at kids with a care experience.”*

Titled *“From Strength to Strength: improving the care system for children and young people through participation”* the conference aimed to connect, empower and change the care system by and for children and young people in out-of-home care. International and Australian expert speakers at the conference included Emily Munro (UK), Professor Judy Cashmore (Sydney University), Dr Joseph McDowall (Executive Director, Research CREATE Foundation), Nicola Atwool (NZ), Adam Diamond (Canada) and many more.

Examples of programme topics were: Health and Wellbeing; Leaving Care and supporting effective transitions; Education, What makes a successful placement?; international perspectives on young people’s transitions to adulthood; overcoming early stress and trauma directions; building and strengthening connections for kids in care; cultural identity and family and culture; workshops and presentations on participation; art workshops with musician, Ryan, teaching song lyric writing, and Dean (cartoonist for *The Simpsons* and more) with a workshop on sharing your story through cartoons, and more.

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CREATE Foundation is the peak consumer body for children and young people in care. We are a not-for-profit organisation connecting and empowering children and young people in care and improving the care system through activities, programs, training and policy advice. Learn more at www.create.org.au

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