

MEDIA RELEASE

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NEW INDEPENDENT SURVEY ON EXPERIENCES OF WA CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE

Perth, 26th March, 2019, CREATE Foundation will hold a state briefing on findings from the largest independent survey of West Australian children and young people with an out-of-home care experience. The results indicate that over half of young people surveyed remain unaware of their care plan, experience placement instability and lack the appropriate channels to have input into the plan for their own life.

Key findings in WA indicate that only half (50%) of the survey respondents knew about their case plan (i.e. a plan for their life) and of those, 55% felt they had a say in the plan itself. Nationally, 92.7% of respondents agreed with the statement that they “felt safe and secure” in their placement and in WA, 92% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement. 34.3% of those surveyed experienced an unwanted move to another placement, and 14.7% said they were consulted about the move. When it came to leaving care after the age of 18 years of age, 65% of WA young people were aware of their transition plan.

The latest survey is the largest of its kind being via **direct consultation** with children and young people about their care experience under the *National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009–2020*. The lack of access to those who are currently living in care presents a significant challenge and highlights the need for improvement to assist services reach those who need it most.

The highly anticipated report, titled: ***Out-of-Home Care in Australia: Children and Young People’s Views After 5 Years of National Standards¹*** is a follow up from CREATE’s 2013 independent Report: *Experiencing Out-of-Home Care in Australia: The Views of Children and Young People*. CREATE was encouraged to see that WA government supported the research this year.

This study concentrated on placement issues and levels of participation, and dealt with all life domains including education, health, relationships (family and friends), identity, and culture.

In the latest survey, over 1,275 children and young people, between 10-17 years old, shared invaluable insights into what is working well and what still needs to be improved in the child protection system. The survey focussed on these key areas: knowledge about care planning, having a say in their plan for their life, if young people feel safe and secure in their placement, and feeling prepared to transition to independence (leave care).

Perth’s Chris, 22-years-old, entered care as a toddler and shared insights about his placement instability: *“In my case, instability of placements affected my studies, my friendships and relationships. I became very anti-social and relationships became harder. I felt this anger, out of a continual build-up of rage against the system.”*

With regard to planning, Chris felt very positive, stating: *“I was very fortunate during my leaving care to have really supportive Foster Carers who helped me a lot. I didn’t leave ‘til I was around 20, and the main part they helped me with was getting my first car. They helped me find out what supports were available and taught me about budgeting so I could get a car and travel.”*

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The survey found that children and young people clearly indicated it **was important to them to have a say about decisions affecting their care experience, particularly concerning their daily activities, where they lived, and their contact with family members.**

A comprehensive set of findings will be revealed at today's briefing, with key WA insights below:

- Overall, 92.7% of respondents agreed with the statement that they “felt safe and secure” in their placement and in WA 92% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement.
- Children and young people in home-based care tended to have a more stable care experience than in Residential Care or Independent Living; Kinship Care respondents reported the most stable placements, with three quarters of these meeting the Standard.
- Almost 35% of young people in WA were placed with all of their siblings. This figure is highest across all states comparatively.
- 50% of respondents indicated they knew about their case plan (that it existed) and 55% of that group had been involved in their own case planning.
- 36% of respondents with siblings in care were separated from all their brothers and sisters (split placements) and in WA, this figure was almost 25%.
- Carers were significantly more involved than were caseworkers in helping children and young people maintain family contact, and helping young people in their education needs.
- When children and young people were given a chance to assign an overall rating to the performance of their main system support (department or agency), they gave a score of 65% (overall) while those in WA approached 74%.
- Respondents in WA, ACT, NT and TAS were noticeably below their state or territory average for Internet access; Overall, 60% of those in residential care could access the Internet, which means many young people in care are unable to access the internet for education, social or other reasons.

CREATE's Executive Director of Research and survey author, Dr Joseph McDowall spoke about how the CREATE reports, over the past five years, addressing the national standards clearly show where to direct focus to improve the out-of-home care system in Australia.

“The research team were very pleased that Western Australia chose to participate this year and that they have agreed to commence an information sharing arrangement to enable CREATE to reach more young people in out-of-home care in WA,” shared Dr McDowall.

“WA performed consistently. It was around the national average on just about all measures (a little low on knowledge of cultural support plans, as were all jurisdictions), and did particularly well on leaving care planning with the older age group, and young people having a say in decision-making.”

Ms Jacqui Reed, CREATE Foundation Chief Executive shared it was interesting to see results clearly illustrating the important role of carers in keeping children safe.

“The new survey found that most children and young people will have 3 to 6 case workers and that foster carers are their greatest support,” commented Ms Reed.

“Their care and attention instil a positive and stable adult influence in a young person's life, so it is vital to see the system establish robust tools and supports for carers to strengthen the likelihood of placement stability and they are adequately equipped to keep doing a great job.”

The results have revealed a wide range of domains which require focus and attention to strengthen a system under strain. What remains disheartening for CREATE Foundation is to continually see that not only are young people growing up with the challenges of placement instability, but there remains a lack of opportunities for young people to have a say in important decisions that affect their lives and to feel they are heard (68%).

INVITATION: Be the first to hear the WA results by RSVP'ing to join CREATE's national launch event 10-11.30am, Friday 29th March, 2019. Presenters include Executive Director of Research and report author, **Dr Joseph McDowall**, sector and government representatives, as well as hearing powerful stories shared by CREATE's **young people** on their experiences, followed by a lively discussion around how the child protection sector can work together to improve the lives of children and young people in out-of-home care.

Details: The Kindle Room Foyer Oxford, 196 Oxford St, Leederville, WA, 6007.

CREATE Foundation is the national consumer body representing the voices of children and young people with an out-of-home care experience (including kinship care, foster care and residential care). CREATE develops policy and research to report on and advocate for a better care system. For more information please visit www.create.org.au or 1800 655 105

Media Enquiries: To discuss a story idea or an interview with Jacqui Reed, Joseph McDowall or a young person, contact Leigh White via 0431 932 122 or hello@leighwhite.com.au ; or Andrea Doney via 0402 050 418 or andrea@admarcoms.com.au

View CREATE's past reports here: <http://create.org.au/publications/>

Source: 1. McDowall, J. J. (2018). *Out-of-home care in Australia: Children and young people's views after five years of National Standards*. Sydney: CREATE Foundation.

Source 2: *Child protection Australia 2017–18 report*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 8/3/19.

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