

Accessing Complaints Processes Within Out-of-Home Care in the Northern Territory

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Background

Every child and young person has the right to have a say about their happiness, wellbeing, and safety, and to be heard. When children and young people encounter harm or lack safety in their living environment, it can be necessary for the state to intervene, and as a result they are placed into out-of-home care. While under the protection of the state, it is expected that these children and young people are provided with the support to speak up if anything is worrying them, or if they are unhappy with a part of their life in care. This is necessary for ensuring children and young people have a say in the decisions that are made regarding their life.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12; United Nations, 1989) outlines the basic human rights that apply to all children. The convention has been agreed to by 191 countries, including Australia. The Northern Territory's *Charter of Rights for Children in Care* adopts the rights outlined in the UN's Convention. In their own charter of rights, the Northern Territory government makes a commitment to ensure that young people in out-of-home care (OOHC) understand their right to express their views or to speak up about concerns they may have about their treatment in care, and that these rights are promoted by those who care for them.

In the absence of a consistently supportive parent or guardian who can act as an advocate, children and young people in care often have their voices go unheard within our communities. Young people and children in care often experience trauma as a result of neglect, abuse or emotional harm, which usually occurs in the context of social disadvantage and intergenerational trauma (DCP, 2015). It is important for these children and young people to develop trusting relationships with adults whom they can speak with if they are unhappy or worried about their experience. However, these relationships can be hard for young people in OOHC to build, due to placement instability and inconsistency of caseworkers (McDowall, 2013). It is therefore essential to have strong policy and practice in place that ensures young people and children in OOHC understand their right to complain, and are provided with the adequate means of support and assistance to do so.

The Royal Commission into Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory found that there was insufficient oversight of the care and protection systems in the Northern Territory and that the complaints processes were not properly advertised or effectively used (2017). Following on from the recommendations given by the commission, the Northern Territory Government pledged to strengthen the complaints process and systems in order to better receive and act on complaints (Territory Families, 2019). Territory Families committed to work with the Commission for Children and Young People to provide child-friendly complaints processes, in order to place children and families at the centre of decision-making.

The Present Consultation

Territory Families *Policy: Complaints Management* (2017) clearly states that staff are expected to inform all children, young people, and carers about their right to raise concerns and make complaints. Clients and members of the public can make a complaint directly to Territory Families Regional or Local Offices, the Complaints Unit or to an external review body such as the Children's Commissioner. Territory Families also have an online feedback and complaints portal (Territory Families, 2019a, 2019b), and a toll-free phone line that young people can access.

This consultation was conducted by the CREATE Foundation, in conjunction with Territory Families, to hear directly from young people aged 12 to 18 with a care experience living in the Northern Territory at the time of the consultation. It seeks to better understand the factors that may hinder or enable children and young people to exercise their right to speak up about their concerns whilst in care and find out if they are able to access the appropriate help to resolve the issues.

The present consultation aimed to hear about their experiences of making a complaint and focuses on areas such as:

- their understanding of Territory Families complaints process;
- key facilitators and barriers when raising concerns;
- processes participants used to raise complaints; and
- ways to improve the current process that encourage young people to raise issues in the future.

The findings of this report aim to provide valuable information for Territory Families, necessary for developing and refining strategies and practices to ensure children and young people feel safe and supported in speaking up and voicing their complaints. This will help to promote strategies for better outcomes and wellbeing for young people with a care-experience in the Northern Territory overall.

Method

Participants

A total of 26 young people aged 12 to 18 with an OOHC experience participated in this consultation. Participant demographics are presented in Table 1. Within the participant group there were 12 females, 13 males, and one non-binary person. The majority of the participants had been in care for over two years; just under half (12/26) were living in foster care. Eight identified as living with a disability, and the majority (7/8) reported receiving assistance for their condition. It is known that around 90% of the care population in NT are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (Territory Families, 2019); in the current sample, 20 (76%) of the young people identified as Aboriginal.

Materials

The survey consisted of 30 questions and contained a range of question types such as rating scales, binary questions, comment boxes and open-ended questions (see appendix A). A variety of question styles provides opportunities for young people to express their views in a way that suits them and as such allows better insight into their experiences.

The consultation focussed on participants understanding of the complaints process. It explored young people's experiences in making complaints, factors that inhibited them from complaining, and enquired about ways in which the complaints process could be improved. Quotes from participants were recorded verbatim in order to retain the authenticity of their words and have been used as such in the main findings of this report.

Procedure

The participants were selected based on the following selection criteria: Resided in the Northern Territory at the time the survey was conducted, were aged between 12 and 18 years, and were existing members on ClubCREATE's database. Participants were selected at random and were invited to participate via phone and email contact.

The consultation was conducted in accordance with the CREATE *Consultation with Children and Young People* and *Disclosure* Policies. Informed consent was obtained from all young people, and carers or caseworkers signed consent forms on behalf of young people 17 years and younger, or verbal consent was recorded where participants completed the consultation over the phone. All participants were provided with a Participant Information Sheet (either directly or through CREATE's web site) detailing the nature of the consultation and informing young people that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. Young people were told that if they revealed information that led the interviewer to believe they, or another young person in care appeared unsafe or in danger of harm, their situation would have to be reported to the relevant authorities.

In recognition of the time and effort provided by young people for the consultation, each participant was provided with a \$25 gift voucher. Young people answered the consultation questions over the phone with a CREATE staff member, or they completed the survey online through Survey Monkey. The quotes in this document have been taken directly from the voices of children and young people with

a care experience. In order to protect the identities of the young people involved, attributions of the quotes in this report are made using the participant's sex and age.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Demographics	Number of Young People
Age	
10-12	3
13-15	12
16-18	11
Sex	
Male	13
Female	12
Non-Binary	1
Culture	
Aboriginal	18
Torres Strait Islander	1
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	1
Other (Dutch)	1
No Special Group	5
Placement Type	
Foster Care	12
Kinship Care	5
Permanent Care	3
Residential Care	4
Semi-Independent Living	1
Independent Living	1
Disability	
Yes	8
No	15
Prefer not to say	3

Table 2. Survey Method

Survey Method	Number of Young People
Online (Independent)	5
Telephone Interview	20
Online (Group)	1

Limitations

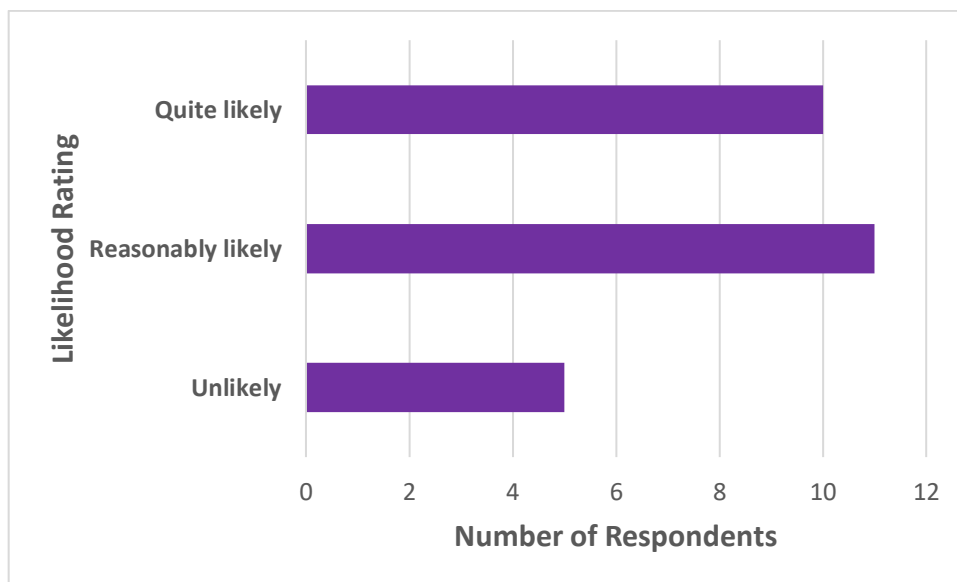
The intent of the study was to hear from children and young people in the Northern Territory about how well they understand the complaints process, to find out what barriers young people face in making complaints, and enquire about in what ways the system could be improved to ensure young people are able to speak up and raise their concerns. It should be noted that the study is limited by its sample size (n = 26) and selection based on volunteer respondents. As the majority of participants identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, sometimes from remote areas where English may not be a first-language, the interview process was sometimes hindered by cultural and language barriers. Aboriginal young people can experience many barriers when accessing the complaints system which may extend to discussing past concerns or complaints, such as fearing bringing shame upon extended family or communities, and mistrust of authority figures or “the system” from negative past experiences and/or inherited trauma (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019). A more culturally-sensitive study may produce a more nuanced set of findings in the case of the Northern Territory where Aboriginal young people make up 90% of the care population. This would enable a more broad-reaching study that may represent the views of the wider care population in the NT.

Findings

Providing Feedback to Territory Families

Young people initially were asked to rate how likely (0: Not at all likely; 10: Very likely) they would be to give feedback to Territory Families if they were satisfied or happy with an aspect of their care experience. For ease of interpretation, the scale responses were divided into three categories: Quite likely (8–10); Reasonably likely (4–7); and Unlikely (0–3). Figure 1 shows the responses to the likelihood of giving positive feedback.

Figure 1. Ratings of Likelihood of Respondents Giving Territory Families Positive Feedback



Note. Quite likely: 8–10; Reasonably likely: 4–7; Unlikely: 0–3 on 0–10 analogue scale used.

Clearly, a majority of young people were positively disposed to giving constructive feedback to Territory Families when they were happy with the treatment they were receiving. As indicated in Table 3, most would talk directly with their case manager or caseworker, while several others would phone or email the department office.

Table 3. How Young People Provide Positive Feedback to Territory Families

Feedback Process	Mentions (n = 20)
Speak to caseworker	7
Phone department	6
Email department	3
Speak to carer or community	2
Speak to CREATE	1
Use Territory Families website	1

When questioned regarding their knowledge of the official online feedback process introduced by Territory Families, only nine of the 26 respondents were aware of its existence. Unfortunately, when given the opportunity to tell the department how they thought the feedback process could be improved, only 10 of the young people responded. Three couldn't think how the processes could be improved; the remainder shared mixed thoughts:

Um, I mean a website is pretty good. It would be a lot easier if you'd call; then again, giving feedback isn't really that easy. (Non-binary, 15 years)

Respond faster. (Male, 14 years)

Give guidance that is easy to understand. (Male, 17 years)

Some people don't have access to online, so maybe phone calls as well.. yup. (Female, 16 years)

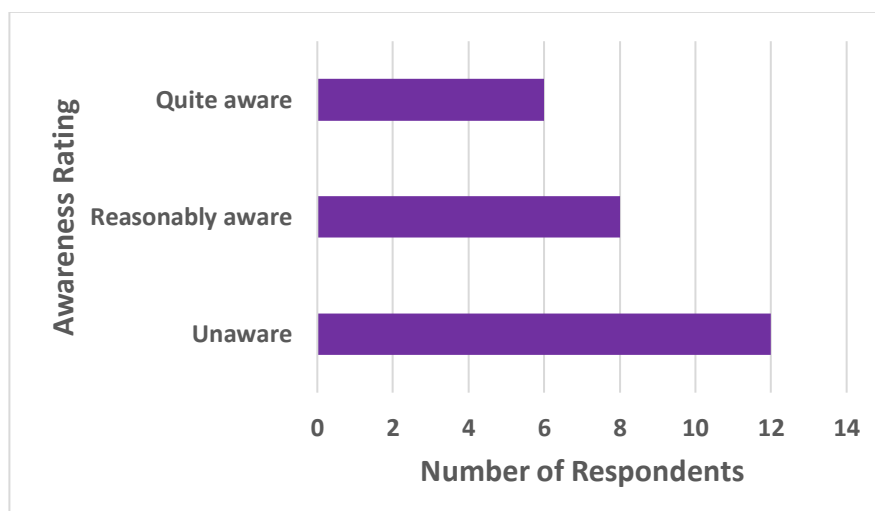
They should give us a free phone. (Male, 16 years)

Raising Complaints with Territory Families

Awareness of Complaints Process

When asked to rate their awareness of the complaints processes Territory Families have in place for concerns about standards of care (0: Not at all aware; 10: Very aware), almost half of the young people stated that they were not very aware (0–3 on the scale; n = 12). Six young people reported being Quite aware of the processes (8–10 on the scale). The overall results are summarised in Figure 2.

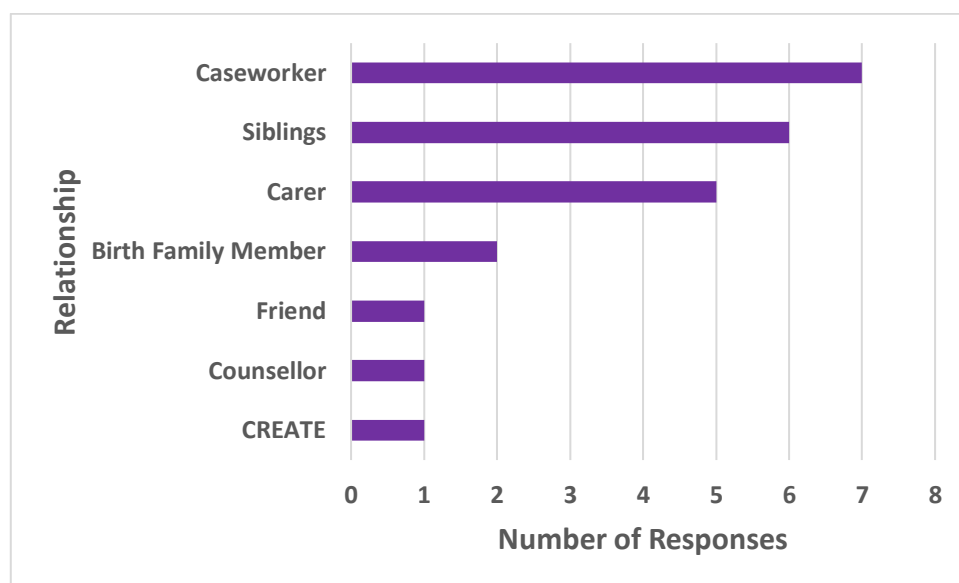
Figure 2. Young People's Awareness of Territory Families' Processes for Raising Complaints



Who Young People Speak To About Their Concerns

Most young people (n = 22; 84%) reported that they have someone to talk to if they were feeling dissatisfied or unhappy with an aspect of their life in care; 21 of these young people provided further responses specifying their relationship with this person. These results are summarised in Figure 3.

Figure 3. People to Whom Respondents Spoke When Dissatisfied or Unhappy with Care Experience



Note. There was a total of 22 responses from 21 participants. Some participants provided more than one response.

As seen in Figure 3, caseworkers were the most common support (n = 7) that young people felt comfortable to speak with when they were dissatisfied or unhappy. This was closely followed by siblings, and carers. It is understandable that caseworkers and carers would figure prominently in this situation, as they would have the greatest influence to effect change. The relatively high number of respondents who would share with their siblings shows how important this continuing relationship can be for providing emotional support.

Knowledge of Complaints Mechanisms

Questions were included to determine the knowledge young people had of special mechanisms that Territory Families have introduced to make raising issues easier, viz., a toll-free phone number and a link on the Sortli app. Of the 26 participants, 14 (54%) were aware of the toll-free phone number, while only three (12%) knew about the app link, largely because 18 (69%) didn't have a personal copy of the Sortli app.

Deciding When to Complain

Participants were asked how they would decide whether to raise a complaint or not. There were three key factors mentioned by the young people that supported decisions to complain; however, there was a more varied response regarding factors that hinder young people from speaking up. These results have been summarised in Table 4.



Table 4. Thematic Analysis of Factors Influencing Young People When Deciding to Raise a Complaint

Summary of Young People’s Responses	Number of Mentions (n = 19)
Factors That Facilitate Decisions to Complain	
Having a support network (carer, caseworker, siblings, counsellor, CREATE)	13
Seriousness of concern (risk of physical or emotional hurt of self or others, fear for safety)	4
Complain immediately without consult	2

Having a support network. Young people are more likely to raise issues if they have a range of people forming a support network to whom they can turn. Overall, 13 participants (50%) mentioned that they would first consult someone within their support network when deciding whether or not to raise a complaint. This list included carers, siblings, caseworkers, Create staff, or counsellors. As seen in this list, some but not all those involved would understand the formal complaints process themselves or have the ability to escalate the complaint.

I would talk to my sister about if it’s a good idea or not, and then I would do it in email and letter. (Female, 14 years)

Seriousness of Concern. Some young people noted they would assess the gravity of the situation before complaining, and would complain if there was a risk of physical or emotional pain for themselves or others.

I would see if it was causing me or anyone around me harm. Like if it was serious or caused hurt to anyone – either physical, mental or emotional. I would tell [them]. (Female, 16 years)

Maybe I will complain, if it endangers me. (Male, 17)

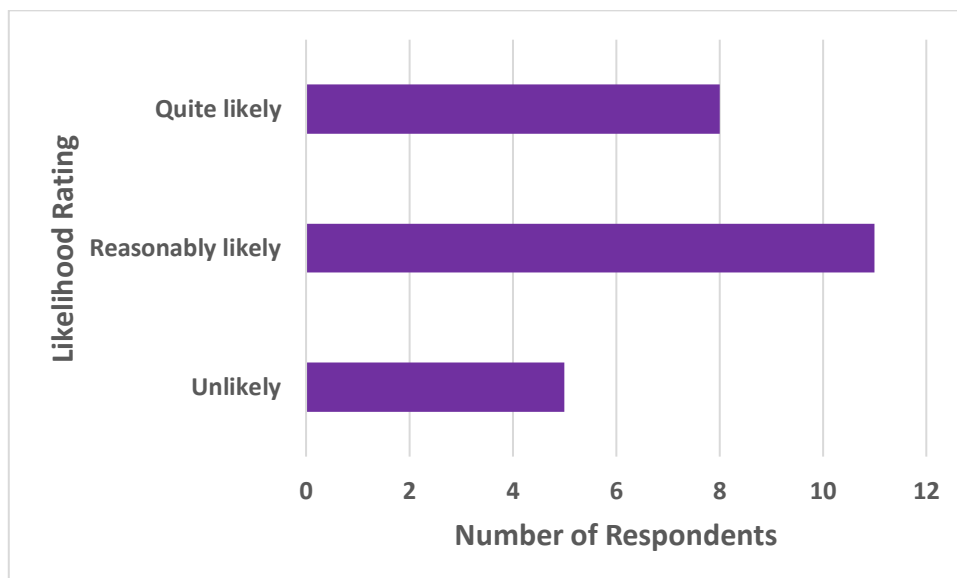
Complaint immediately without consult. Some young people (n = 4) noted that they would simply complain straight away without necessarily going through a decision-making process, possibly so they didn’t have a chance to change their minds.

Just do it straight away. (Female, 18 years)

Likelihood of Making a Complaint

Young people were asked to rate how likely they would be to make a complaint if they were dissatisfied or unhappy with an aspect of their life in care (scale 0: Not at all likely; 10: Very likely). Scores were categorised into three groups: 0–3: Unlikely; 4–7: Reasonably likely; and 8–10 Quite likely. Eight young people (33%) were Quite likely to raising a complaint in the future, however, four respondents stated that, even if they were unhappy, that outcome would be unlikely. These findings are summarised in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Likelihood of Making a Complaint If Young Person was Dissatisfied or Unhappy.



Note. Only 24 of the 26 young people consulted gave answers to this question. On the scale of 0–10, Quite likely: 8–10; Reasonably likely: 4–7; and Unlikely: 0–3.

Following this question, young people were asked if there was anything their caseworker or department could do to make it easier for them to raise issues if they had concerns. Only 10 respondents took the opportunity to suggest changes; three of these didn't have any complaints, and one didn't like talking to people. The others provided a mixed set of observations:

I would just say it to them, and they would do all the stuff. (Male, 16 years)

I don't know . . . have like a meeting with them . . . Um, like [it would] have to be something very serious. (Female, 15 years)

Provide better support. (Male, 17 years)

Um, making sure that they [case worker] do something about it. Like being able to . . . like seeing a result. They could just keep me informed. (Female, 16 years)

Ask me if I had a problem. (Male, 16 years)

I don't know my case worker, who they are? (Male, 16 years)

Experiences Making a Complaint

Reasons for Complaining

The majority of participants (16/26) had never made a complaint before. Of the 10 participants who reported having made a complaint, five gave reasons for their complaint.

I hated being in care. (Male, 13 years)

Just about like the way we get treated, just by the whole system. (Female, 13 years)

About a carer. (Female, 15 years)

Not being allowed to go out all the time. (Female, 17 years)

Just a small complaint. (Male, 17 years)

Who Young People Raised Complaints With

Caseworkers tended to be the first point of contact for most of these young people who had made a complaint (four out of the five who responded). One young person complained to his carer, and one communicated directly with Territory Families.

Of the young people who reported having made a complaint, most don't recall a particular process that they went through for lodging the complaint. Largely, those who responded spoke of simply telling their caseworker and that being the end of the process.

I don't remember the process, I just told them and then it was over. (Female, 15 years)

I just complained to the caseworker and didn't hear anything. (Female, 13 years)

Through the letter that I sent. (Male, 17 years)

Outcomes of Making a Complaint

Of the 10 young people who reported having made a complaint, eight young people provided further information regarding their experience. There were mixed responses, with five young people reporting they had a positive experience, while three young people reported having a negative one. More details are given in Table 5.

One young person noted that on multiple occasions he was not listened too, and as a result he no longer had trust in the complaints system.

Most times no one was listening to me, even though I told them directly. [Now] most times I just run away from the carer. (Male, 13)

Table 5. Thematic Analysis Regarding Outcomes of Young People's Complaints

Experience Making Complaint	Mentions (n = 8)
Positive Experiences	
Problem was resolved	2
Felt listened to	3
Negative Experiences	
Didn't feel listened to / believed	2
Took too long	1

Barriers to Speaking Up

Past Concerns That Weren't Formally Raised

Six participants reported a past incident or concern related to being in care which they did not raise as a complaint. The issues reported are summarised in Table 6.

Table 6. Past Concerns Not Raised as Complaints by Young People

Concerns	Mentions (n = 7)
Sibling separation	2
Not seeing (or worried about not seeing) birth family enough	2
Poor treatment from carers	2
Forced to move states	1

Note. There are seven responses from six young people; one young person mentioned two concerns.

Factors Inhibiting the Making of Complaints

Three key themes emerged when young people were asked about what stopped them from raising a complaint. Results are summarised in Table 7.

Table 7. What would Increase the Likelihood of Young People Raising Complaints

Reason	Mentions (n = 11)
Issue talked through or was resolved	3
No likelihood of outcome	2
Concerned about impact on others	2
Not comfortable	2
Don't know how	2

Issue Talked Through or Was Resolved. A number of respondents explained that they didn't feel the necessity of complaining because the issue they had was eventually resolved, either as a result of action by the department (sometimes after lengthy delay), or from the young person personally working through the problem or discussing it with members of a support network.

Because after a while they did say that I was allowed to see my mum so I didn't complain. I waited a solid two months. (Female, 14 years)

Sometimes, if I'm feeling angry or whatever, I just talk to whoever is around. I'm alright. (Male, 16 years)

Because I would deal with it. (Female, 15 years)

No Likelihood of Outcome. Other respondents didn't complain because they felt there was no point, nothing was likely to change even if they spoke up.

I don't think they would go through with it. If I did make a complaint I would go big-mouth about it; I would just go say it to someone's face. (Male, 16 years)

I don't know, I was young. They wouldn't listen anyway, so I didn't say anything. (Female, 18 years)

Concerned About Impact on Others. Some young people did not raise the issue because they were concerned how others might react to their revelations.

I didn't want to make a big deal about it, or say it to my grandmother. (Female, 13 years)

Cared too much about others feeling. (Female, 17 years)

Not Comfortable. One young person chose not to pursue a concern because she did not like talking with adults and didn't feel comfortable with the process.

I guess I don't really talk that much with adults. Oh like . . . yeah case worker or case manager at the time. it's just like . . . [I felt] not comfortable. (Female, 15 years)

Don't Know How. The remaining two of those who commented indicated that their problem was that they didn't know how to raise the issue concerning them.

What do I do? (Male, 16 years)

I was young and didn't know what to do. (Female, 15 years)

What Would Help

As a final question, young people were asked if there were anything they would like to tell Territory Families about how the out-of-home care complaints process could be improved. Five young people

reported being happy with the way the system currently is. Results provided by the remaining nine respondents are summarised in Table 9.

Table 8. Suggestions That Could Help Improve the Complaints System for Young People

Suggestion	Mentions (n=10)
Listen to young people more	5
Provide better, respectful care	3
Caseworker stability	1
Educate young people about the system	1

Note. Some young people gave more than one answer.

Listen to Young People More. Five young people suggested that case workers and the department need to listen to young people’s voices better. Their comments include:

They should listen first, like listen to younger kids as well, not just when they get around 15 and older and then they listen. And also kids need to be safe in care and be respected and not disrespect. and take good care about them, keep them healthy and do sports as well. (Female, 18)

Yeah, like, not just listening and then not get back. (Female, 13 years)

Provide better, more respectful care. As mentioned above, some young people suggested that their care should be more respectful, and keep them healthy and safe. This meant, for example, being asked more often if have concerns or worries.

I'm not sure . . . you know? Because it really depends on what age you are. For my age, [16] they [the department] could call us and see how we are. Like I'm pretty sure the case managers should be checking in once a month. (Female, 16)

. . . to, like, ask them what is wrong. (Female, 12)

Case Worker Stability. One young person commented on the instability of case workers as a limitation on young people’s ability to complain. Case workers are often young people’s first point of contact for making a complaint. Maintaining consistency in their relationship allows trust to develop between a caseworker and the young person.

Um, stop changing case managers, like they are busy and you have to have a new case manager and all that. Yeah. (Male, 14)


Educate Young People About the System. One young person mentioned the need for better education for young people in care around the complaints process and how it works. Young people need to be aware of their rights, and kept updated throughout the process.

Wish we knew more about the process. (Female, 12)

Discussion

This consultation sought to hear from young people living in Northern Territory with a care experience about their understanding of the complaints process, their experiences in raising concerns, and perspectives on how Territory Families could improve the current complaints process.

Under half of the young people consulted had raised a complaint in the past. Of those who had raised a concern, only half were able to recall a process similar to the complaints process outlined in Territory Families Policy. The young people who did recall a process and were involved in making a complaint mostly reported the process starting and finishing with speaking to their caseworker. This suggests that there is more work that needs to be done in order to ensure young people who raise concerns are



given the option of being kept regularly updated throughout the process, and that their complaints are taken seriously.


Most participants were likely to raise a complaint in the future if they were unhappy or concerned with a part of their life in care. However, while over half of the young people reported the likelihood of raising a concern, less than half reported being aware of the processes Territory Families have in place if they needed to raise a complaint. About half were aware of Territory Families toll-free phone number for complaints, and only one third of young people were aware that Territory Families have an online feedback process. This mirrors the findings from *The Royal Commission into Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory* (2017) which found that there was insufficient oversight of the care and protection systems in the Northern Territory, and that complaints processes were not properly advertised or effectively used. This suggests that much more needs to be done to increase young people's awareness of their right to complain, their knowledge regarding what they can complain about, the complaints processes in place, and the available supports or resources available to them.

Beyond understanding their right to complain, the findings also reveal several other structural barriers that prevent young people from speaking up when they are dissatisfied or unhappy with an aspect of their care experience. Some barriers that were raised through this consultation by young people were: not feeling comfortable enough to raise concerns; avoiding possible conflict or hurt feelings; and, most importantly, not feeling as if they will be believed or listened too by the adults with whom they share their concerns. As a result, this tends to cause a sense of diminished confidence in the complaints process and fosters a general dissatisfaction with the whole system. Likewise, the belief that young people will not be listened too, based on having negative past experiences in which they felt they were not taken seriously, led to young people being less likely to disclose their concerns again.

Some young people suggested the need to be given more opportunities to speak up; often this was as simple as "being asked" if they have any problems or concerns that they need to raise. McDowall (2016) highlights the necessity of encouraging young people to participate in decision-making that affects their lives, through engaging them in meaningful dialogue (both listening and responding to children and young people). This ensures that young people feel involved and supported to be an agent in the process of raising concerns. Evidently many young people are ready to speak, but want to be given the space to do so more often, and to feel properly heard as a result of speaking up. This is consistent with the findings in the South Australian OGCYP (2019) report that make it clear that properly responding to young people prevents them from becoming reluctant to disclose concerns again in the future.

Having a supportive network greatly assisted young people's ability to raise their concerns. Fortunately, most young people consulted reported having someone they could speak to if they felt dissatisfied with their experience in care. However, not all those mentioned by young people would have the ability to escalate a complaint. Many children and young people reported that their caseworker would be someone they can talk to if they were concerned, or someone to whom they would go in order to raise a complaint. McDowall (2018) highlights the ongoing problem of caseworker instability and the affect it has on developing trustworthy relationships between caseworkers and young people.

Some participants mentioned the need to be better supported to complain if they need to. These values underpin Territory Families' *Charter of Rights* (2020) which strives to have children and young people have a say and be heard, to be provided with information, and to tell someone if they are unhappy. However, while these values are inscribed in policy, the greatest challenge can be implementing these processes in practice. While Territory Families already has accessible complaints processes in place, such as online feedback and website accessibility, there is a need to properly educate young people and children about these facilities available to them, and to encourage them through creating a more positive complaints handling culture where young people feel listened to and taken seriously. This requires staff to be properly trained in providing young people support through child-safe services, and to be regularly reviewed to ensure they are meeting the standards set through



policy. Workforce retention within child protection has been an ongoing issue for some time in many jurisdictions (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2010). There is an urgent need for solutions that minimise staff turnover and maximise retention in order to provide young people the necessary continuity of support to see more positive service outcomes.

Conclusion

All children and young person have the right to have a say and be heard on matters that concern their wellbeing, happiness, and safety. The present consultation aimed to hear from young people with a care experience in the NT about their understanding of the complaints system, their experiences making complaints, and any ways they think to improve the complaints system. Young people with a care-experience in the Northern Territory participated in the consultation. The results found that, while many young people were willing to raise concerns, there is still much work to be done to increase young people's understandings of the complaints process and their rights regarding making complaints. Some young people had a lack of faith in the system, and felt as if they were not believed or listened to by their caseworkers or the department when they have raised concerns. Others felt that they didn't see results when they formally lodged a complaint. Having a support network greatly assisted young people's ability to speak up, although many of the young people consulted identified a range of barriers that hinder the possibility of raising concerns or worries. Territory Families needs to embark on programs designed to raise the awareness of children and young people in care regarding the supports already in place for facilitating complaints management, and to develop a culture more responsive to positive and negative feedback.

Actions

1. Increase Young People's Awareness of the Complaints System.

- Provide the necessary support to carers, residential workers, and caseworkers that enables them to communicate to children and young people their rights, and information about the services available to them when raising concerns. Ensure the same is done for other trusted adults in young people's lives (such as teachers and counsellors).
- Develop and promote recourses that explain the complaints system to children and young people in a way that is child and young-person friendly.
- Since 90% of children and young people in care in NT are Indigenous, develop complaints recourses in young people's first language, or in easy-to-understand English with video/photo assistance, for children and young people for whom English is not a first language.
- Ensure communication of rights and complaints processes are ongoing and regular (providing check-ins and updates).

2. Create a Positive Complaint Handling Culture

- Adopt the recommendations of *The Royal Commission (2017)* that states Territory Families should regularly survey complainants about their satisfaction with the complaints process, in order to ensure young people are seeing outcomes and are agents in improving the system.
- Work with staff and carers to ensure all concerns that are raised by young people are formally raised as a complaint, and standardise the handling system that follows to ensure all complaints are taken seriously.
- Ensure complainants are given the option to be regularly updated on the outcomes and progress of their complaints to maintain faith in the complaint system amongst young people.

3. Create More Opportunities for Young People to Speak Up


- Ensure young people have fortnightly check-ins with a trusted adult in their life, and are regularly asked directly, in a manner that adheres to child-safe and trauma-informed principles, if they have any concerns or worries.
- Provide more opportunities for children and young people to build trust with caseworkers and Territory Families staff with whom they communicate.

4. Ensure Staff are Properly Trained to Adhere to Child-Safe Principles, Culturally-Safe Practices, and are Trauma Informed

- Invest in enough caseworker staff to meet the demands of the child protection system, and work on retention of caseworker staff to decrease instability.
- Ensure staff understand and practice child-safe principles, and that they build trusting relationships based on respect.
- Whenever young people raise concerns or complaints, staff always listen and respond in a timely manner that is both safe and empowering, always taking young people's views seriously and communicating regularly, no matter the outcome of the complaint.
- As stated in the *Complaint Handling Guide* (2015), staff should not only be trained in cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, but work towards eliminating bias and barriers Indigenous young people face when accessing or participating in the complaints system.

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Appendix A. Complaints Processes Survey

CREATE Consultation: Complaints Processes (Northern Territory)

WHAT IS THIS SURVEY ABOUT?

There are formal complaint processes available to children and young people who live in out-of-home care. Such processes are designed to enable young people to speak up and seek support if they are unhappy about their treatment in care. Complaints can be made, for example, if you are unhappy with an aspect of how your carer or caseworker is looking after you. You can also provide feedback, to tell us about things that are working well for you in care and where you think we can improve things.

We are interested in learning about YOUR understanding of, and experience with, complaint processes: if you feel able to, or have complained; how you complain; the type of things you have, or are likely to complain about; what it is like for you to complain; and what would make the complaint process better for you.

INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO COMPLETE THIS SURVEY

Please answer all questions and leave comments where applicable. You can click through the sections by clicking "Next" at the bottom of the screen. At the end of the survey click the "Done" button.

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Before you begin, we would like to remind you of a few things:

- Doing this survey is completely voluntarily and up to you. You can stop doing this survey at any time and this will not affect you joining in with any other CREATE activities.
- You can skip questions if there are reasons you would rather not answer them, but we hope you will share your views with us on as many issues as possible.
- Everything you tell us in this survey will be kept confidential (this means private) unless you tell us something that makes us concerned for your safety or for the safety of another young person in care, then we may have to tell someone. We will speak with you before we do.
- You can have a support person help you with the survey if you would like.
- We may use the information gained using the survey for reports and presentations but we will NEVER use your name. You will be anonymous in these reports.

Having understood the above information, by continuing with this survey you are giving your consent to participate.

For more information on consultation participation, you can refer to CREATE's website, or ask your local CREATE Office (1800 655 105) for a Consultation Participation Information Sheet.

1. What method are you using to complete this survey?

- Online Independent
- Online as a group (with a staff member)
- Telephone interview
- Face-to-face interview
- Other (e.g., hard copy)

DEMOGRAPHICS

2. In what state or territory do you live in?

3. What is your post code?

4. How old are you?

5. I identify as:

- Male
- Female
- I identify with another gender. *Please specify:* _____

6. Culturally, I identify as:

- Aboriginal
- Torres Strait Islander
- Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- No Specific Group
- Other Cultural Group (non-English speaking background) *please specify:* _____

7. How old were you when you came into care?

8. What type of placement do you live in at present?

Please select only one.

- Foster care
- Kinship care
- Residential care
- Permanent care
- Semi-independent supported accommodation
- Independent living
- Other *please specify:* _____

9. Do you have a disability?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

If you answered yes, what type of disability or impairment do you have? Please describe in your own words.

10. If you answered yes to the above, are you receiving special support for your disability? (This could include medication, special education, or counselling, etc)?

- Yes
- No

Any additional comments:

Complaints Processes – Territory Families

Children and young people in out of home care are entitled to give Territory Families feedback about all aspects of their care experience, both when things are going well and/or if there are problems. The questions below relate to these two situations.


11. How likely are you to give feedback to the Department if you are satisfied and happy about an aspect of your experience in care?

Not at all likely (0) _____ (10) Very likely

12. How would you go about providing that feedback to the Department?

13. Do you know that Territory Families have an online feedback process?

- Yes
- No



14. What, if anything, would you like to tell the department about how they can improve the process for children and young people to give positive feedback about their care experience?

15. How aware are you of the processes Territory Families have in place to allow you to tell them or complain if you have concerns about your carer or the standard of care you receive?

Not at all aware (0) _____ (10) Very aware

16. Do you have someone you can talk to if you are dissatisfied or unhappy with aspects of your life in care?

- Yes
 No

If you answered yes, what is the person's relationship to you? (e.g. Carer, caseworker, birth parent, friend)?

17. If something about your experience in care was worrying you, how would you decide whether to complain about it or not?

18. Do you know that Territory Families have a toll free phone number for complaints?

- Yes
 No

19. Do you know that there is a link to Territory Families complaints on the SORTLI App?

- Yes
 No
 I do not have SORTLI

20. Have you ever made a complaint?

- Yes
 No

21. What did you complain about?


22. Who did you complain to? (Please tick all that apply)

- Caseworker
 Carer
 Birth Parent
 Other family member
 Partner/ Girlfriend/ Boyfriend
 Friend
 The Advocate/ Commissioner for Children and Young People
 Other (please specify)

23. Can you describe the complaints process you used?

24. If you have had a positive experience with complaining, please help us to better understand what worked well for you (e.g. problem was resolved, I felt listened to)?

25. If you have had a negative experience with complaining, please help us to better understand what did not work well for you (e.g. was unhappy with the outcome, I didn't feel believed)?



26. How likely are you to make a complaint if you are dissatisfied or unhappy about an aspect of your experience in care?

Not at all likely (0) _____ (10) Very likely

27. Thinking about the score you have given above, what could your caseworker, or the department, do to INCREASE the likelihood of you complaining if you did have a problem?

28. Can you think of something related to being in care that may have worried you in the past which you HAVEN'T complained about?

Yes

No

If 'Yes', please share what this is, if you are comfortable to do so:

29. What would you say was the main reason for you NOT speaking up and complaining about this issue?

30. What (if anything) would you like to tell the department about how they can improve the complaints process for children and young people in care?

Thank you for completing this survey! To allow CREATE to use your responses in our final report you will need to provide us with your consent. To do this, please copy and paste the link below into your web browser and fill in the details.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Consent_and_Voucher_Complaints_Processes_TF

To say thank you for the time and effort you have taken in answering these questions, we would like to give you a \$25 gift card! If you would like to receive a gift card, the link above will ask you to provide your postal address and contact details. If you do not want a gift card, you can simply select no.

Please be sure to submit your responses before you leave this page by clicking the "DONE" below.

If you have any questions about the survey, or if you would like to know more about what CREATE does for children and young people in out-of-home care, contact your local CREATE Office on 1800 655 105.



About CREATE

CREATE Foundation is the national peak consumer 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 care system, in consultation with children and young people, through advocacy to improve policies, practices and services and increase community awareness.

We achieve our mission by providing a variety of activities and programs for children and young people in care, and conducting research and developing policy to help us advocate for a better care system.