



Creating a better life for children and young people in care

CREATE Foundation Response
to
Terms of Reference: Select Committee on Child Protection
House of Assembly, Tasmanian Government

CREATE Foundation is the peak body representing the voices of all children and young people in out-of-home care. CREATE is the only organisation in Australia established for the sole purpose of advocating on behalf of children and young people in care at both national and state levels.

CREATE's core mission to create a better life for children and young people in out-of-home care is achieved through:

- **connecting** children and young people to each other, CREATE and their community
- **empowering** children and young people to build self-confidence, self-esteem, and skills that enable them to have a voice and be heard
- **changing** the care system, in consultation with children and young people, through advocacy to improve policies, practices and services.

CREATE commends the Tasmanian Government for establishing the Select Committee on Child Protection which is charged with the responsibility of inquiring into and reporting upon the adequacy of Tasmania's child protection systems.

CREATE is pleased to respond to the Terms of Reference and submit the following comments to support such a critical enquiry into matters that relate to the welfare of children and young people.

Whilst CREATE notes that the Committee's Terms of Reference have a clear focus on Early Identification and Prevention Strategies relating to children at risk of statutory engagement with the Department of Health and Human Services, CREATE's response provides specific reference to those children and young people currently in out-of-home care, or who have had a care experience, and the broader spectrum of Intervention Services. These Services include, but are not limited to: placement provision and stability; provision of and access to education, health and therapeutic supports; opportunity to develop social relationships and sustainable support networks; and, supported development of life and after care skills.

Therefore, in reference to points (a) and (d) of the Terms of Reference, it is CREATE's position that young people's participation in the planning of the above Intervention Services and transition from these services to healthy futures, is critical to both current best practice and to potential reduction of long-term contributing factors such as homelessness, substance usage and mental health issues affecting community members with care histories.

Participation

The experience of children and young people in out-of-home care may often be filtered by adults involved in their lives: carers, case workers, parents and at times, lawyers. However, the children and young people themselves live the experience and have a great deal of wisdom and information about what they think and what they need while in care.

As CREATE advocates nationally to improve the out-of-home care system and be an independent voice for children and young people in care, seeking children and young people's views is at the forefront of CREATE's approach to systemic advocacy. One approach CREATE utilises to capture the voices of children and young people in care is Be.Heard – a consultation process centred round an interactive survey tool which can be customised to meet the specific 'information' requirements of an organisation, such as a government department undertaking an internal evaluation of its service delivery. The consultation process involves administering the survey face-to-face with individuals or small groups of no more than four, undertaking data analysis and providing a written report.

The Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services, after detailed dialogue with CREATE, commenced implementation of the Tasmanian Be.Heard Project in July 2008. The aim of the Project was to consult with children and young people living in out-of-home care across the four (4) regions of the State over a period of two (2) years. The subsequent report outlined the collective findings from interviews with 96 children and young people conducted across Tasmania during the project's two-year timeline. CREATE has presented two interim reports (one each for the South West region and the Northern region) and a briefing paper for the South Eastern region of Tasmania. The final Be.Heard Report has now been submitted to the Department of Health and Human Services.

As the Department of Health and Human Services directly sought feedback from Tasmanian children and young people in care on a range of issues which have relevance to the Terms of Reference, CREATE commends the Tasmanian Be.Heard Report to the Select Committee.

Transitioning from out-of-home care to independence

As the Select Committee would be aware, under Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009a), Transitioning to Independence is one of the 12 national priorities identified in the National Framework's Implementation Plan 2009-2012 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009b). For this priority, the specific areas of action to be addressed in relation young people transitioning from out-of-home care to independence are:

- increasing support through non-government organisation to assist young people leaving care to better establish their independence; and
- providing better support for young people as they leave care through State and Territory government initiatives (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009b:18).

Through recent and current research work¹ relating to key priorities for young people transitioning from out-of-home care to independence, CREATE has captured the voices of 720 young people with a care experience. As such, it is CREATE's informed opinion that inaction in providing adequate initial support for care leavers will result in significant financial costs to government, and critical life-impacting costs to those young people concerned. Those considered to have specific relevance to the Terms of Reference are:

- Where housing and accommodation options are not explored early enough in transition planning, young people are at an increased risk of homelessness.
- Young people in care have a higher rate of suspension or expulsion from school than the general population and their academic results are lower than those of young people in the general public. Poor academic opportunities directly relate to limitations to employment options.
- Instability of placement with frequent movement, reduces opportunity for positive life-skill development and emotional and social well-being.
- Homelessness, poverty, and mental health issues are all linked as long-term contributors to child abuse and neglect and all have been identified as Transition from Care issues which governments, at both Commonwealth and State levels, can address through a suite of both targeted and integrated services responses.

¹ CREATE recent and current research referred to are:

- Project 1. 2009: *Create Report Card 2009 – Transitioning from Care: Tracking Progress*
 - STILL IN CARE Young People's Survey (15-18 years of age) – 275 respondents
 - LEFT CARE Young People's Survey (25 years maximum age) – 196 respondents
- Project 2. 2010: What's the Answer? Young people's **solutions** for improving transitioning to independence from out of home care
 - Initial Consultations (i): CREATE Youth Advisory Group (YAG) Focus Groups – 27 young people
 - Initial Consultations (ii): One-to-One Interviews with a young person representing special interest groups – 5 young people
 - NYAC Forum: One-day consultation forum with delegates drawn from CREATE's National Youth Advisory Council (NYAC) – 10 delegates
- Project 3. 2010-11: 'What's the Plan?' Campaign
 - Young People's (over 15 years) Baseline Survey – 207 respondents

CREATE acknowledges and commends the work of Disability, Children, Youth and Family Services (DCYFS) and Housing Tasmania in the development of a Transition Program which seeks to transition young people leaving care to independence without experiencing periods of homelessness. The Transition Program offers young people leaving care an additional level of support and preferential access to public housing as a counterbalance to their inherent lack of family and community support resources.

This support, preferential in nature, empowers the young person leaving care by requiring their active participation and commitment to engaging with DCYFS, Housing Tasmania and an external support organisation.

CREATE would suggest that a comprehensive evaluation and review of this initiative should occur with translation of learnings contributing to informed, evidence-based cross-sectoral program development and implementation in the areas of Child Protection, Health and Education.

Bibliography

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