

National Youth Advisory Council

Summary Report 2011



create
FOUNDATION

Creating a better life for children and young people in care



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www.create.org.au/nyac

Acknowledgement

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1. Introduction

1.1 About CREATE Foundation

CREATE Foundation (CREATE) was founded in 1993 to provide an independent voice for children and young people with an out-of-home care experience that involves foster, kinship or residential care. CREATE works in partnership with child and family welfare stakeholders including the state, territory and commonwealth governments, foster carers, community organisations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies, church and welfare agencies.

CREATE's mission is 'Creating a better life for children and young people in care'. CREATE does this 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, and increasing community awareness.

In CREATE's core principles it is recognised that participation is the cornerstone of best practice. Children and young people with a care experience can not only provide information about their experiences, they often have insightful ideas about how the child protection system can be improved. As the national peak body for over 35,000 children and young people with a care experience, CREATE utilises several strategies that promote direct dialogue with and participation by children and young people in care including the Young Consultants Program, Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs), the National Youth Advisory Council (NYAC), Be.Heard and CREATE Report Cards.

1.2 About Youth Advisory Groups and the National Youth Advisory Council

YAGs are state and territory based groups with an open membership of young people aged 12-25 years old with a care experience. YAGs meet at least six times per year to discuss state and territory care issues, explore solutions and to provide feedback and advice on how CREATE can best represent the opinions and views of children and young people in care at a state level.

To harness the ideas and energies generated from YAGs and to give young people a stronger voice at a national level, CREATE established NYAC which comprises three representatives, termed youth delegates, to represent young people in care in each state and territory.

The aims of NYAC are:

- for children and young people in contact with CREATE to identify issues that inform CREATE's advocacy and strategic direction
- to provide information to CREATE staff and/or government regarding legislation, policy and practice
- to improve the care system, and the lives of children and young people with a care experience.

Once a year, YAG participants are invited to nominate as NYAC youth delegates. Delegates must be 15-25 years old and able to demonstrate their capacity to contribute against a range of selection criteria. NYAC has a current membership of 22 youth delegates ranging in age from 16 to 23.

CREATE hosts a NYAC summit each year which brings together the NYAC youth delegates from across the country with a focus on developing plans that address key issues impacting on children and young people in care. A pre-planning phase identifies the key issues prior to the summit. Following the summit, delegates then work with CREATE staff and relevant sector stakeholders to implement the action plans at a national and state level.

This report provides a summary of the pre-planning and issues identification stages of the NYAC summit, summit dinner and the action plan for 2011.

2. Pre-planning and Issues Identification

2.1 Key summit themes

Early in 2011 a pre-planning tool was sent out to CREATE offices in each state and territory. Young people who participated in YAGs and as NYAC youth delegates were asked to identify and rank key issues relating to transitioning from care within their state or territory. Transitioning from care was selected as the overarching issue for 2011 because delegates at previous summits have consistently highlighted the challenges faced by care leavers. Whilst some positive progress has been made nationally and in some states and territories, the process of change is slow and gradual, and the CREATE report card series suggests that there is still a lot of progress to be made.

The pre-planning process resulted in the identification of nine broad areas including: transition from care plans and related casework; accommodation, housing and homelessness; health (dental, mental health, medical); knowledge of supports or networking; driving; employment and education pathways; accessing files and belongings; transport and life skills.

The three key issues identified for 2011 were:

1. Transition from care planning
2. Housing and homelessness
3. Health and well being



2.2 Transition from care planning

What do we know about transition from care planning?

- Young people transitioning out of OOHC are more likely to be under-educated, unemployed or underemployed, incarcerated or involved in the criminal justice system, experience homelessness, be dependent on social assistance, have mental health issues, be at higher risk of substance abuse and become parents at a younger age (Tweddle 2007).
- Research in Victoria showed that a case plan with a focus on providing stable accommodation has significant positive associations with education, employment, housing stability, and financial outcomes for young people (Ramen, Inder & Forbes 2005).
- Legislation across every Australian state and territory states that young people exiting OOHC should have a case plan or leaving care plan. Of the 605 young people who participated in the *2011 CREATE Foundation Report Card Survey*, 31.4% reported having a leaving care plan in some stage of development. When only responses from 17 year olds (n = 195) were considered, 56% of young people on the threshold of leaving care still do not have plans, contrary to legislative requirements (McDowall 2011).

When asked to identify significant issues facing care leavers in planning for their transition from care, the youth delegates stated the following:

- *"Don't have information you need"*
- *"People don't have skills and can't access services"*
- *Plans should include "more holistic leaving care plan provisions for future interests, hobbies, health, etc."*
- *Frequent contact between young people and workers was important. One young person stated "Young people may not be able to have their say when they need to due to a lack of contact"*
- *"Not enough input from children and young people in leaving care plans"*
- *Planning for transitioning needed to start early because "Young people need to be well prepared for transitioning from care and also because young people tend to disengage," and "There's not enough time to finish the plan thoroughly".*

2.3 Housing and homelessness

What do we know about housing and homelessness for young people with a care experience?

- Homelessness is a significant issue facing young people across Australia. Children and young people in care have been specifically identified as a group at risk of homelessness in Australia in both the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020* (NFPAC) and *The Road Home (2008)* White Paper on homelessness.
- The *2009 CREATE Foundation Report Card (McDowall 2009)* stated that from a sample of 190 young people aged 18-25 years who had left care, "50.5% had been required to leave their placement when their care order expired. Disturbingly 40.6% of this cohort (n = 39) did not know where they would be moving to following the placement." The report also stated that 34.7% of young people reported an episode of homelessness within the first year of leaving care and that respondents had lived in an average of 4.9 places per year since they turned 18.
- In another recent study, *Pathways from Out-of-Home Care*, 73% of respondents from Western Australia and Victoria who had previously been in care had spent time living on the streets. The researchers state "less than one-third felt somewhat or very prepared to find accommodation... For many young people the housing market is confusing and over-coming numerous obstacles confronting, yet little has been done to address this. Housing has long been identified as a critical element of the transition from care and there is a clear need to ensure that preparations for leaving care focus more attention on this area." (Johnson, Natalier, Mendes, Liddiard, Thoresen, Hollows, & Bailey 2010: 34).

When asked to identify significant issues facing care leavers in relation to housing and homelessness, the youth delegates listed the following:

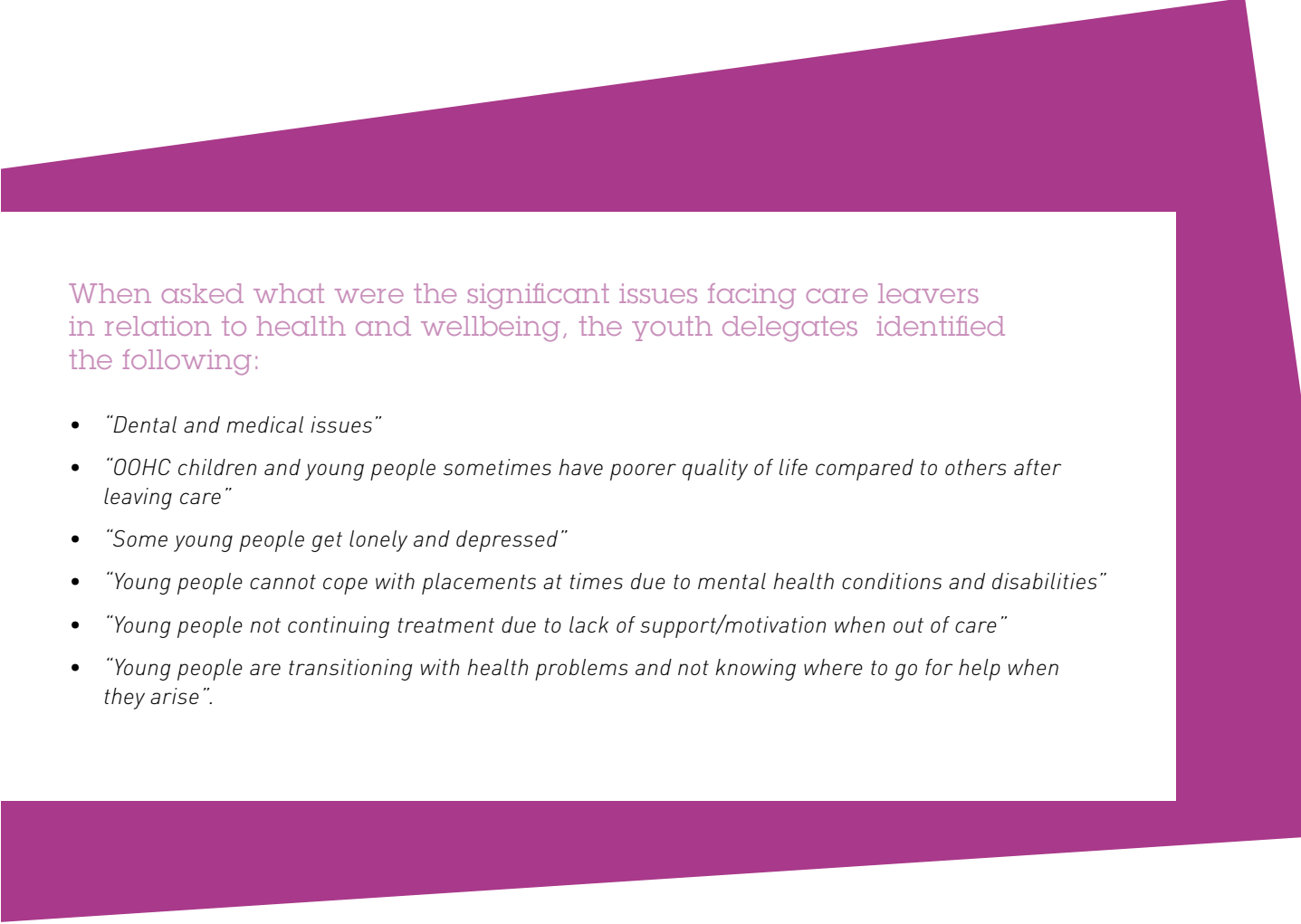
- "Not having the ability to find your own house and ending up on the streets"
- "No family home"
- "Setting up a house is expensive!"
- "Left to get things done by self, like power/water"
- "Takes too long on the housing list"
- "Nowhere to go when turning 18"
- "Private rentals are too expensive"
- "Young people don't know about renting"
- "Not enough accommodation options"
- "Not enough medium to long term accommodation"
- "Eligibility and lack of housing options".



2.4 Health and wellbeing

What do we know about health and wellbeing for young people with a care experience?

- *“Young people who have been abused or neglected may experience reduced social skills, poor school performance, mental health issues and a higher likelihood of criminal offending.”* (AIHW, 2011b: 103).
- In the *Health of Children in “Out-of-Home” Care Paediatric Policy* (RACP 2006) the Royal Australasian College of Physicians outlined a significant record of poor health outcomes amongst children and young people in care in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The RACP noted that while Australian data was limited it suggested a similar pattern of high needs, citing high levels of language delays or disorders and oral health problems amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children attending the Kari Clinic in NSW. In addition, there was a prevalence of poor hearing and vision, and high numbers of children not reaching the usual developmental milestones in other programs and trials.
- The high incidence of mental health issues amongst young people in care has been noted across Australia by several bodies including The Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia, The NSW Children’s Guardian and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (Commissioner for Children and Young People WA (2011). *Report of the Inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Western Australia*).



When asked what were the significant issues facing care leavers in relation to health and wellbeing, the youth delegates identified the following:

- *“Dental and medical issues”*
- *“OOHC children and young people sometimes have poorer quality of life compared to others after leaving care”*
- *“Some young people get lonely and depressed”*
- *“Young people cannot cope with placements at times due to mental health conditions and disabilities”*
- *“Young people not continuing treatment due to lack of support/motivation when out of care”*
- *“Young people are transitioning with health problems and not knowing where to go for help when they arise”.*

3. The NYAC Summit

From 20-23 May 2011, CREATE Foundation hosted the 3rd National Youth Advisory Council summit, a forum for young people with an out-of-home care experience to have a voice and be heard by key decision makers. Representing every state and territory, young delegates came together for three days of workshops, activitiesand fun!

The 2011 summit theme was again Voices for Change illustrating the consultative approach CREATE has taken towards 'hearing' young people's views on their care experiences, the issues they face and how the child protection system can be improved. Delegates were invited to bring their ideas in order to formulate draft action plans relating to the key issues:

1. Transition from care planning

2. Housing and homelessness

3. Health and wellbeing

In order to support them in their role, CREATE provided delegates with training and development in the areas of advocacy and media. Several delegates were given the opportunity to put these skills into action by participating in the CREATE summit DVD and in media activity (see Appendices 1 and 2 of this report).

On Monday 23 May, delegates also had the opportunity to use their skills as they discussed and promoted their ideas with key decision makers from child protection agencies, statutory authorities and CREATE's corporate partners and board of directors at a special stakeholder forum.

During the stakeholder forum, delegates and stakeholders from across the country engaged in robust and healthy discussions about how to make the ideas in the draft action plans clearer and potentially more effective. The feedback was diverse, but most often pointed to:

- sourcing evidence and data to show that the issues and ideas were significant
- including details in the action plans and publications about what the sector could do to help
- ensuring there wasn't a duplication of existing initiatives (the phrase 'environmental scan' was used several times!)
- the need to recruit support for ideas - for example, sending a national briefing to the meeting of Children's Commissioners and Guardians in November and asking them to champion our ideas, presenting to Council of Australian Governments or gaining the support of carers
- demonstrating the use of project planning, and effective delivery and evaluation processes.

This feedback has been incorporated into the development of the final action plan and a call to action, and will also inform more detailed project plans during implementation.

Finally, the summit culminated in a conference dinner at the Star Room, Darling Harbour on the Monday evening.... and what a night it was!!

The dinner, hosted by Julie McCrossin (journalist and broadcaster), recognised the contribution of youth delegates during the summit and featured a blend of celebration and entertainment.

Guests were treated to the unique song, story and dance of the Koomurri performers from diverse nations and tribes across Australia, whilst CREATE took the opportunity to recognise the efforts of its own staff and young people, as well as supporters Stephen Dunne, Managing Director of AMP Capital Investors and Gordon Cairns, Chairman of Origin Foundation.

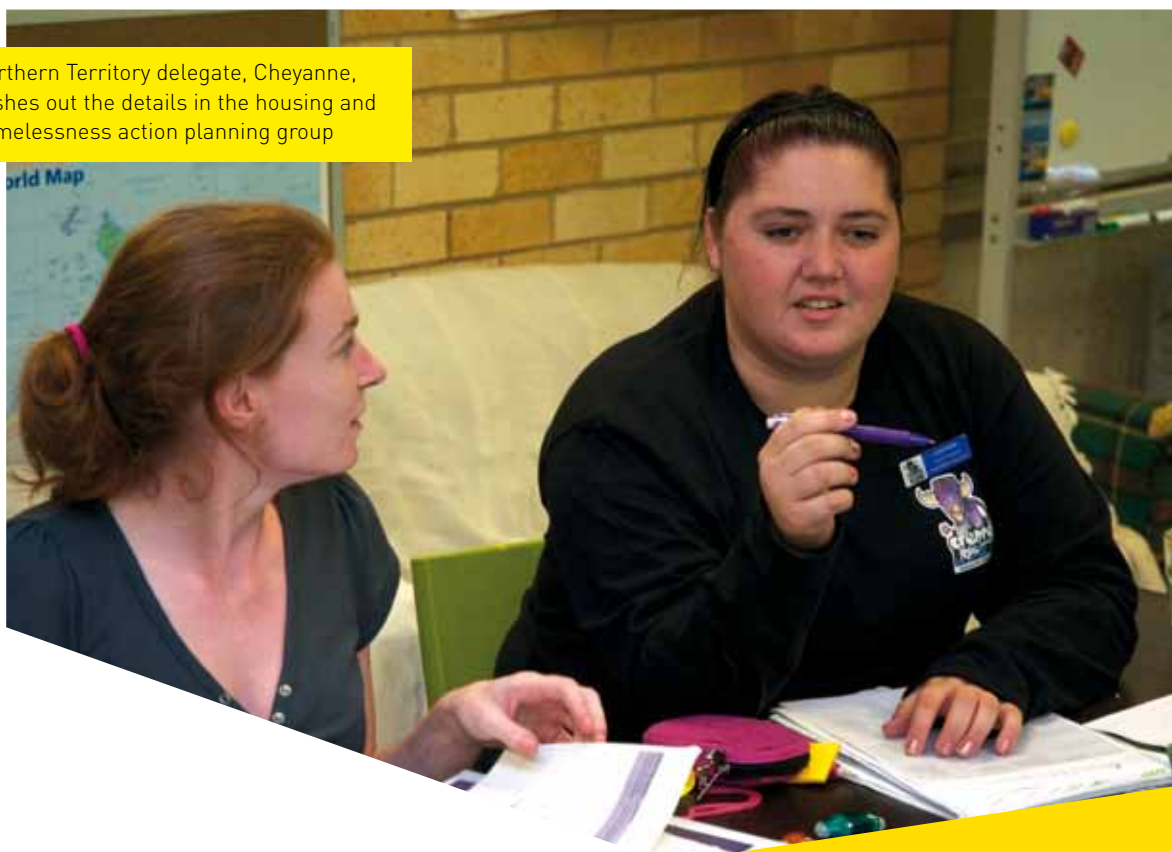
4. CREATE's plan and a 'Call to Action'

Throughout 2011 CREATE Foundation youth delegates, staff and board members will progress the following action plan. CREATE is committed to improving the lives of children and young people in care and will advocate for the following initiatives as one way to promote change.

The time to act is now! National and international evidence, some quoted in this report, continues to show that children and young people in care and leaving care are not receiving the help and support they need to transition successfully to adulthood and independence. Current national, state and territory initiatives and inquiries such as the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*, the Northern Territory *Growing them strong, together* report and *Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry* provide opportunities to create real and sustainable change for the children and young people in care. These children and young people are some of the most vulnerable in our communities and require a commitment from all to protect them from any further harm.

The following plan provides simple and focussed objectives for nationally consistent and state-specific initiatives that are guided by the perspectives of young people in care. With these perspectives as our guide and our 'road map' we aim to identify potential solutions and commit to achieving change. CREATE recognises the efforts and achievements of Australia's out-of-home care sector partners in supporting those children and young people in and leaving care. We again seek your commitment and assistance and invite child protection ministers, government departments and non-government organisations to join us in supporting the following action plan and implementing the points outlined in the subsequent 'Call to Action'.

Northern Territory delegate, Cheyanne, hashes out the details in the housing and homelessness action planning group



4.1 NYAC Action Plan 2011/12

Issue	Objective	Actions for NYAC delegates and CREATE staff
Transition from care planning	<p>Increase support available to young people and adults who are transitioning from care by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - developing nationally consistent transition from care planning resources that include state specific information, in a transition from care kit to enable young people to have access to relevant information and resources - promoting positive outcome stories of young people who have exited care through clubCREATE - expanding and further promoting the <i>CREATE Your Future</i> (CYF) website and workshops so that young people participating in the program have access to current information about support services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a nationally consistent transition from care kit based on a review of current state based kits, which includes state-specific resources. • Develop resources to address health and wellbeing issues for inclusion in the kit, including a self care checklist and a DVD similar to <i>This is Us</i> developed in conjunction with Beyond Blue and the Queensland Government. • Map the housing supports available to young people up to the age of 25 years with a care experience, including information about renters programs and housing programs, and review and update the <i>CREATE Your Future</i> workshops and website. Program content will include nationally consistent information as well as state-specific content.
Housing and homelessness	<p>Young people will increase their access to housing resources and programs by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mapping existing state based housing resources and programs - reviewing and updating the <i>CREATE Your Future</i> website and program - including the reviewed housing information in transition from care kits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on the information identified in mapping exercise of housing services, CREATE will advocate for improvements to policy or services where gaps or inconsistencies across states are identified. • CREATE will continue to contribute to the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, where transitioning from care and out-of-home care standards for children in care are priorities.
Health and wellbeing	<p>Improve the health and stability of children and young people in care by increasing awareness of young people about health and wellbeing issues and the services available to address them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CREATE will continue to contribute to the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, where transitioning from care and out-of-home care standards for children in care are priorities.

4.2 A Call to Action

- CREATE calls on relevant ministers and departments as well as non-government organisations to support and promote NYAC action plans and projects by:
 - sharing and contributing information and resources relevant to the development of transition from care kits, health and wellbeing modules and housing services in each state
 - committing funds for the purchase of a kit for young people eligible to receive leaving care support
 - committing to active use of this kit in TFC case planning and reviews by departmental or out-of-home care agency case workers
 - actively promoting CREATE Your Future program to young people transitioning from care and making active referrals to the program.
- CREATE request that ministers and departments explore opportunities for improvement based on the outcomes of the mapping exercise undertaken by CREATE.
- NYAC delegates confirm their support for national consistency for children and young people in care. We support the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children and in particular the National Out-of-Home Care Standards and Transitioning to Independence priorities. We call on the federal government to continue consultation directly with children and young people as models and frameworks progress.

Throughout July and August 2011 CREATE will be approaching stakeholders at a national, state or territory level to discuss and collaborate on these plans. We look forward to your support and contributions in this important process.



Northern Territory delegate, Joseph, with Dr. Howard Bath Children's Commissioner, Northern Territory

5. References

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The Royal Australian College of Physicians (2006) *Health of children in "out- of- home" care*. Sydney: RACP

Appendix 1: Media Alert

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MEDIA ALERT

Tuesday 17 May 2011

NATIONAL SUMMIT: *KIDS VOICES FOR CHANGE ARE HEARD!*

February 20-23, 2010, CREATE Foundation will proudly host the 3rd National Youth Advisory Council summit, a forum for young people with an out-of-home care experience (i.e. foster, residential, kinship care) to have **a voice and be heard** by key decision makers.

24 young delegates representing every Australian state and territory will come together for three days of workshops, activities and fun.

A delegate from last year's summit said *"For me, it [the summit] is the only thing that happens where you are asked for your opinion and it is taken seriously."*

In Australia today, over 35,000 children and young people live in out-of-home care increasing by 10% every year. Through no fault of their own, children and young people may be placed in care due to neglect or abuse and are more likely to be undereducated, homeless, become a parent at a younger age, or be involved in the juvenile justice system.

This year's summit theme is **voices for change** and illustrates CREATE Foundation's consultative approach in 'hearing' young people's views on their care experiences, the issues they face and how the system can be improved. Young people attending will discuss the achievements in their respective states, and the issues facing kids in care with the aim of identifying potential solutions.

At the 2011 summit the key themes which young delegates will discuss are:

1. Transition from care planning
2. Housing and homelessness
3. Health and wellbeing

When young people turn 18 years of age it is usually the time when they transition out of care and into independence. Transitioning from care is often fraught with challenges and the young people usually do not have a 'home' to bounce back to when the going gets tough.

The 2009 report card found that 63%¹ of young people transitioning from care did not have a leaving care plan developed for them. CREATE Foundation recently completed the *What's the Plan?* campaign focused on informing young people of their entitlements and how to go about getting a leaving care plan.

Transitioning remains a key issue and the *CREATE Your Future* program is one of the ways that CREATE Foundation aims to support young people. This month CREATE Foundation secured funding of \$1.2 Million (over 2 years) for the *CREATE Your Future* program, enabling it to be offered in every state and territory, rather than being limited to a few as previously.

Jacqui Reed commented that CREATE Foundation has been campaigning vigorously for adequate funding to support the CREATE Your Future program. The program is an essential resource able to positively affect the life outcomes of care leavers.

"The Gillard Government's recognition for increased funding clearly indicates their support for improving the lives of young people in out-of-home-care", stated Ms Reed.

"Yet, no single solution will solve the problems in a short space of time. Together we must remain resolute to work towards sustainable systemic change to offer young people what they deserve, a positive start to adulthood."

During the campaign CREATE consulted with a wide range of young people with a care experience. Watch this video and hear to their voices, stories and what they believe would bring about positive change for care leavers here: ***What's the Answer?***

The campaign included a survey designed with two aims (i) to determine how many young people in care have a leaving care plan; (ii) to evaluate the leaving care planning one year after CREATE's intervention aimed to raise awareness of the need for leaving care planning. The new report titled **"Transition from care planning in Australia: An Evaluation of CREATE's *What's the plan?* Campaign, CREATE Report Card 2011"** will be launched in Sydney at 9.30am, Monday 23rd May, 2011.

This weekend's National Youth Advisory Council summit culminates in a dinner with key decision makers including federal and state ministers, child protection agency representatives, statutory authorities, and CREATE's corporate partners and board of directors. The evening will have an Indigenous Australian theme with unique song, story and dance from Koomurri performers from diverse nations and tribes across Australia. Hosted by Julie McCrossin, journalist and broadcaster, the dinner includes addresses by guest speakers: Stephen Dunne, Managing Director, AMP Capital Investors and Gordon Cairns, Chairman, Origin Foundation, plus the sharing of wisdom from summit delegates with an out-of-home care experience.

CREATE Foundation represents the views of children and young people in out-of-home care and is an advocate for change to improve the care system and life outcomes for kids. CREATE is one of a handful of organisations globally and the only one of its kind in Australia expressly established to advocate on behalf of children and young people in care.

CREATE Foundation works closely with federal and state government across the country to improve the care system for children and young people in out-of-home-care.

For information on CREATE Foundation or to learn more about the National Youth Advisory Council summit (February 20-22, 2010) phone 1800 655 105 or visit www.create.org.au

Media enquiries:

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Other resources:

The '*What's the Answer?*' report can be found at:
www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/families/pubs/Pages/whats_the_answer.aspx

Further information on the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (which CREATE is a contributor of) is available at www.fahcsia.gov.au

List of References:

¹ CREATE Report Card 2009: Transitioning from care - Tracking progress, Dr Joseph J. McDowall, 2009. CREATE Foundation.

Appendix 2: Summary of media activity related to NYAC and CREATE Report Card 2011

Monday 23 May

7.45 am AM ABC radio news - *'Children leaving state care with no plan for future'*

ABC AM radio midday - *'The World Today - More teens leaving care without future plan'*

ABC TV evening news - *'Foster teens face uncertain future: CREATE'*

The West Australian - *'Teens lack plan when they leave care'*

The Sydney Morning Herald newspaper - *'Emotional hurt endures for grown-up foster children'*

The Australian newspaper - *'No help for grown-up foster kids shows report'*

Tuesday 24 May

NITV Foxtel channel 180 - *'Foster Care'*

ABC Radio North Tasmania

Sunday 26 June

The Mercury, Tasmania - *'Living as a Tassie Foster Kid'*

Friday 8 July

RTRFM, Perth - *'Foster the People'*

Appendix 3: National Youth Advisory Council and Summit Dinner images



Kimberly (NSW), Gerry (Qld) and Amanda (ACT)



Kimberly (NSW) gets her photo taken for the Sydney Morning Herald



Kayaking on Chowder Bay, Sydney Harbour



Lance (WA) and Joseph (NT)



Victorian delegate, Pip, with Bill Frost from Department of Human Services, Victoria



QLD delegate, Primo, with Jennifer Gear from Department of Communities, Queensland



ACT delegate, Amanda, with Rebecca Cormack from ACT Government Community Services Directorate



West Australian delegate, Emily, with Clare Stephens, Acting Advocate for Children in Care, Western Australia



Victorian delegate, Lucy, learns some traditional dance moves from the Koomurri Aboriginal dancers



Tasmanian delegate, Bek, with Gordon Cairns, Chair of Origin Foundation



CREATE Chairman, David Matcham, with Brian Delaney from AMP Capital Investors



CREATE CEO, Jacqui Reed, recognises the contribution of previous young consultants Bree (pictured) and Janelle.



Appendix 5: Summit sponsors and supporters

The National Youth Advisory Council summit was made possible with funding from:

- AMP Capital Investors
- Department for Child Protection (WA)
- Department for Families and Communities: Families SA (SA)
- Department of Children and Families (NT)
- Department of Communities (Qld)
- Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Federal)
- Department of Health and Human Services: Children and Youth Services (Tas)
- Department of Human Services Children, Youth and Families (Vic)
- Department of Human Services Family and Community Services (NSW)



Thanks also goes to those individual supporters who gave generously at the NYAC summit dinner, your contribution will assist CREATE to continue its mission to improve the lives of children and young people in care.



Creating a better life for children and young people in care



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