



# What's important YOUth?

Youth Policy Framework consultation  
for the Office for Youth  
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## CREATE Foundation

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# About CREATE

CREATE Foundation (CREATE) is the national peak consumer body for children and young people with an out of home care experience. We represent the voices of over 43,000 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* 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 facilitating a variety of programs and services for children and young people in care and developing policy and research to advocate for a better care system.

## Introduction

In October 2015, CREATE interviewed 25 young people from Victoria who were either currently in care or have been in the care of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). The consultation facilitated by CREATE Community Facilitators (CY) obtained feedback from young people about their views on what they believe is important for the Office for Youth (OFY) to consider when reviewing and developing the new Youth Policy Framework (YPF).

The final report will be used by the OFY to inform their YPF.

## Methodology

### Participants

CREATE facilitated three focus groups, one metro at the CREATE office in North Melbourne, and the other two in more rural locations including Geelong and Morwell. A total of 15 young people participated in focus groups. A further 10 young people were interviewed across metro and rural areas. A breakdown of the participants can be found in table 1.

Table 1 details the date, type of consultation, number of participants, the age range, gender background and location of the young people involved in the consultations.

Of the 25 young people involved, nine were aged between the ages of 12–18. Sixteen were aged 18–24 years of age. Twelve young people were living in the Melbourne metropolitan area and thirteen young people were living rurally. Twelve of the participants were female and 13 were male. Two young people identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Fifteen young people participated in the focus group whilst 10 young people were involved via an interview process (see Table 1).

Young people were recruited for the consultations through several methods. An email and flyer was sent to all ClubCREATE members within the specified aged groups. ClubCREATE is a CREATE membership of young people with an out of home care experience. CREATE young Consultants (YC) and other recent program attendees within the age group were contacted directly and invited to participate. Further phone calls and emails were made to case workers, foster carers and post care support agencies to support young people they work with to participate.

The success of CREATE engaging with new young people in this project was supported by case workers, program facilitators, foster carers and residential care workers. The metro focus group was held at the CREATE office in North Melbourne as were the metro interviews for convenience of public transport for young people from the metro areas.

**Table 1 Consultation groups demographics by method, age and location**

Date	Consultation Type	Total Number Participants	Age Range	Gender	Cultural Background	Location
6/10/15	Focus Group	5	18-22	2-F 3-M	Anglo Saxon	Melbourne
7/10/15	Focus Group	6	12-20	4-F 2-M	Anglo Saxon	Morwell
22/10/15	Focus Group	4	17-19	3-F 1-M	3- Anglo Saxon 1- Aboriginal	Geelong
8/10/15	Individual interviews	2	19-22	2- F	Anglo Saxon	Melbourne
14/10/15	Individual interviews	2	14 - 22	2- M	Anglo Saxon	Melbourne
14/10/15	Individual interviews	2	21-23	2-M	Anglo Saxon	Morwell-Melbourne
14/10/15	Individual interviews	1	17	1-M	Aboriginal	Geelong
15/10/15	Individual interviews	3	13-16	1-F 2- M	Fijian/Indian	Melbourne

## Questions


Young people were asked a series of questions which were provided by the OFY. The questions were used to generate discussion amongst the participants. The questions were designed to initially determine young people's views about what the most important issues affecting young people are and their reasons for this.

The second half of the survey, provided young people with an opportunity to expand on the subject matter and share their ideas about other non-identified issues and ideas for service and/or policy improvement. The questions used are listed in the Appendix 1.

## Procedure

Each focus group and interview was facilitated by a CREATE Community Facilitator (CF). Focus groups were co-facilitated by a CREATE YC's local to the area. Rural focus groups occurred with existing CREATE Youth Advisory Groups. These consist of young people who are already ClubCREATE members who are familiar with one another.

Focus groups were offered first to potential participants, however if young people were unable to attend the focus groups, individual phone and/or in person interviews occurred. Rural



consultations occurred at a local community service organisation, where both the young people and CREATE have a connection, or over the phone.

Adults present in each consultation was kept to a minimum and had the role of note taker. Participants received a \$50 gift voucher for their participation. Written permission was obtained for young people to participate in the consultation, young people over the age of 18 were able to sign their permission forms whilst those under 18 years of age required signed consent forms from their legal guardian.

The consultations focused on eight identified topics as provided by the OFY:

- education;
- employment;
- training;
- mental health;
- alcohol and drugs;
- discrimination;
- housing; and
- transport.

Young people were supported to engage in the discussion by initially having an activity to break the ice, which was led by the young people.

Team agreements were developed which allowed the group/individuals to set the scene of their space and create group safety. Following this, the facilitator explained the purpose and aims of the consultation.

The CF initially asked each of the young people to scale the eight areas (1-8), with 1 being the top issue affecting young people through to 8 being the lowest issue affecting young people.

Young people were then divided into groups according to their top scoring issue. The young people identify the key reasons why they saw their issue as being significant for young people, before reporting back to the wider group. From here, an open discussion occurred about each topic and what kinds of support initiatives governments could provide.


The consultation allowed for increased understanding of young people's experiences, needs and views as applied to the context of the development of the YPF. The consultation has provided young people with an out of home care experience, the opportunity to be represented in the OFY preparation of the YPF development process.

## Outcomes

### Summary of Key Findings

Mental health (22), housing (20) and education (11) rated the highest scores overall. Alcohol and drugs (6), discrimination (4), employment (2) and training (3) were in the mid-range and transport (3) was the lowest rated issue, as can be seen in Table 2.

Young people were asked to think about why their chosen issue was most important to them. Young people provided comments and explanations for their prioritisation of the key issues. For the purposes of this report, the issues and suggested courses of action have been identified



according to the issue, these are detailed below. Further issues that were not listed as part of the initial eight topics suggested are listed below these.

**Table 2 Issue by ranking**

Issue	Overall placing by young people	Number of rankings as a key issue (rated number one or two by young people)
Education	3	11
Employment	8	2
Training	7	3
Mental Health	1	22
Alcohol and Drugs	4	6
Discrimination	5	4
Housing	2	20
Transport	6	3

## Mental Health

Twenty two of the twenty five young people interviewed believed that mental health is a significant issue affecting young people, especially those who have an out of home care experience.

Young people made strong connections between having positive mental health and being able to sustain their care and take up on beneficial opportunities across their lives. Young people in each of the focus groups discussed the challenges faced in accessing mental health support, including difficulty getting appointments with psychologists, finding the right professional and being able to maintain attendance when they run out of free sessions and are required to pay the full cost of the sessions.

Key points and statements made by young people regarding mental health included:


*“If individuals do not have a good state of mind, then they won’t be able to study well, be productive, or go on with their everyday lives” (Female, 18)*

*“Being a young person, we go through so many changes that can be hard to deal with, to do with developing into adulthood. Mental health issues can make this even harder” (Female, 15)*

*“Mental health is the top issue. This is because it affects everything else. Untreated mental health problems make it hard to focus on education and training and to succeed in these areas. This makes it harder to find a job, and if you have a mental health issue it can interfere with a person keeping a job and then being able to afford housing” (Female, 20 years old).*

Three young people in separate consultations connected mental health issues with suicide and felt that this is an on-going concern for a number of young people.





Regarding the specific mental health needs of young people with an out of home care experience, the young people reported the following:

*“For young people in out of home care mental health is a particularly important issue because usually traumatic experiences have led them to be in out of home care. Therefore they often require a lot of help to deal with these experiences. Early intervention is key in assisting young people” (Male, 22 years old)*

*“Every young person in care is going to go through a phase where their mental health goes down and they need more focus because the carers in their life don’t know enough about how to handle it and they need more awareness about this” (Male, 19)*

The young people interviewed saw mental health as being strongly connected to other life domains, stating:

*“It is very easy for someone to develop a mental health problem due to bullying, stress, genetics etc.” (Female, 18)*

*“Mental health is connected to alcohol and drugs as young people become suicidal or depressed and go to drugs and alcohol to numb the pain. Young people then become reliant because it numbs the pain until they can deal with life” (Male, 19)*

*“Mental health is very difficult when young people have it. It’s important to know about it and how to deal with it, mentally, physically and socially. Mentally, it cannot put you in the right mind space so you are not yourself and lead to anxiety and feeling overwhelmed. Physically, it can make you drained. Socially, it can stop you in your relationships. It can stop you from doing a lot of things and takes away opportunities. It leaves a big impact” (Female, 15)*


Overall, young people believed that mental health services and education services need to work together to better guide young people’s future life plans, with each focus group raising this as an important topic for discussion.

Young people stated that there needs to be more free psychology sessions available in a variety of places. In particular, there is an identified need for increased services in rural areas where young people felt that they had limited choices about who they chose to see.

While one young person (female, 17) identified Mental Health week as being a good start at increasing mental health awareness, other young people believed that there was more that could be done to keep the importance of mental health on the agenda, while also increasing opportunities to offer groups and activities which promote positive mental health.

## Alcohol and drugs

Alcohol and drug were seen by six young people as being a significant issue affecting them and their peers. It was seen as important however not necessarily as key across the board as housing, education and mental health were. Three young people identified the role of peers and older mentors/siblings was a significant issue in young people’s decision to start using, and a further three young people raised the connection between use and mental health issues as being substantial.



Statements and discussion by young people included the following:

*“Being a young person can lead to higher vulnerability and make it easier to get into drugs and alcohol” (Male, 19)*

*“Given social and family circles for young people with a care experience, drugs can be readily available and easy to access and alcohol can be easy to steal from bottle shops” (Male, 17)*

*“Alcohol use is a challenge not a choice, and it is risky for young people as it can lead to hospitalisation, not being able to function properly and risk taking behaviour” (Male, 17)*

*“Alcohol and drugs alone may not be the problem, it’s who you are doing it with and how much. It’s the decisions that are made under the influence that are the problem, but it’s not a problem for everyone” (Male, 17)*

*“When young people are not in a good state alcohol and drugs can lead them to not be in a good mind space, to be sick and cause problems which make it hard to concentrate and focus” (Female, 15)*

It is important to note that one young person did not recognise alcohol and drugs as being a social issue, and one group felt that the focus of drug use has become too much about the drug “ice”, they felt that other drugs were actually just as problematic, if not worse.

## Housing

Young people raised a number of challenges in finding and sustaining housing. Of the 25 young people interviewed, 20 young people raised housing as an area where they personally have experienced difficulties and believe that additional support is required. Common themes included having a period of time between leaving care at 18 years old and when they had secured accommodation which was not transitional in nature.

Statements made by young people about housing insecurity once leaving care included:

*“There is not enough support around leaving care, and this makes it hard to deal with housing. Everyone dodges the question. You get passed on to from agency to agency. I lived in a cold garage and I was sick all the time” (Female, 19)*


*“A lot of young people leaving care bounce from house to house a lot, both in care and post care” (Female, 19)*

*“They’re (the Government) are so harsh with that! I had a week to get out.” (Female, 18)*

*“I was lucky, I moved out a few days after I turned 18” (Male, 19)*

*“I had a one year cap on out of care housing, and there was no help after the year” (Female, 19)*

Each focus group had a conversation about how they had been affected by housing complications due to a limited rental history. When young people are approved for properties, they are often a long distance from their work, school, friends and family with limited transport options, or housing is inappropriate and/or not well maintained. Waiting to be approved for a property was the most challenging issue identified by participants. Young people also connected housing instability with other key issues affecting young people, such as mental health difficulties.



*"We do not transition with enough life skills and we need more information about who to contact when we become independent" (Female, 18)*

*"I have been homeless. You wouldn't know it by looking at me. I ran away from everyone. I only lasted one month in the city. Your mental health gets worse. You cannot sleep because what if someone finds you? What would they do to you? You keep waking up" (Male, 19)*

*"Some housing options that young people leaving care find themselves living in are not good for their mental health, like returning to live with your birth family" (Female, 23)*

*"Young people can't do anything if they don't have housing" (Male, 19)*

Where young people had transitioned successfully, they reported that they enjoyed being independent and that this provided them with a sense of personal competence. In addition, they attributed appropriate housing as providing a safe base where they could begin to focus on getting an education, work and building their future. A key to this was identified as having *"the right information and support"* (Female, 19), as well as good mental preparation in the lead up to leaving care.

## Education

Young people expressed that they have not felt empowered at school and did not have enough support to achieve their best at school. They believed they needed more encouragement to achieve at school while in care and they would have liked more assistance to define and achieve their goals.

Two young people felt that the education system did not ensure that young people with a care experience were listened to, that they weren't allowed to speak up and that their participation wasn't encouraged. A young person spoke about young people with a care experience being *"lost"* in the education system.


Overall, 11 young people rated education as the most important issue affecting young people with the key reason being that this determines their future ability to develop a quality life for themselves. Seven young people stated specifically that being educated was key in obtaining employment and would enable them to build a positive and independent future for themselves. Statements made by young people included:

*"Young people need an education for everything, from a job to a place to live to basically survive, or they can't live life. It takes up a lot of a young person's life so they want it to be worth it" (Male, 16)*

*"Education is important as it is a link to life and is needed for a good job, to get good money, to get a good house, to have good health and to have a good life" (Female, 15)*

A number of young people felt that their education help to assist them in lowering their mental health issues. Whilst other young person raised concern that when young people are expelled or live a long way from their school they can become isolated and that this can be problematic.

Two of the focus groups discussed that young people require living skills which they do not receive at schools, to help set them up for life. Three young people also raised concerns that the quality



of education offered to them, the school environment and the support offered throughout school varies greatly. The young people commented that this can have a significant impact on their experience of education and level of confidence they have towards their learning abilities.

*“Schools do not tell young people about things that really matter. They do not tell young people how to look after themselves, how to be a parent, get housing, and about mental health and drugs and alcohol. Life skills should be taught from 12 years old” (Female, 19)*

*“Schools can have slack expectations and this does not assist young people”*

*“The quality of schools matters” (Female, 17)*

Young people believed that greater support is required in order for them to feel more connected to achieve educational outcomes and future directions in life.

Young people viewed alternative schooling options and programs in schools which assist with building a life to be more valuable. This would assist in allowing individuality in interests and assist young people to see the practical application of education which may be relevant in their immediate lives.

In recognising the importance of remaining connected to the education system, one participant (Male, 17) suggested that young people receive more support to access TAFE and other practical programs to ensure that young people maintain a healthy routine and stability before they become disengaged from education and training.

## Employment


Young people discussed the barriers they faced in finding employment including judgement due to their age and appearance. Two focus groups spoke about feeling stereotyped due to their care experience and that they needed opportunities to build their confidence in a work environment which is free from judgement. One young person (Female, 23) spoke about having difficulties finding employment without a stable address and that this resulted in her being exploited by a “cash in hand” employer.

Two focus groups discussed that often finding employment is about “who you know, rather than “what you know” and that young people, particularly those with a care experience, do not have connections in the work force to appropriately assist them in their employment search.

Participants also spoke about not being exposed to work at a young age, as other young people may have been, so when they apply for entry level jobs without an employment background or connection, they are often denied. This further deflates their confidence in successfully gaining employment.

*“Young people don’t get introduced to work unless their friends are working or it’s something they want to do. If a young person reaches 21 and has not worked they may have trouble finding a job. Young people should have support to get a job at 15 years old”*

*“Finding employment isn’t about your experience, it is about who is cheaper to employ and looks the best. I went for a job when they advertised it saying that they will hire anyone. I got dressed up and they said that they don’t need anyone after my interview” (Female, 19)*



Overall, young people reported that they wanted to work, however require more support to make the transition into the work force.

*“Young people need to be pushed until we can do it for ourselves” (Female, 19)*

*“If young people had the choice, they would be working. Some enjoy not working, however others want to work however can’t get hired” (Male, 19)*

*“Having workers who didn’t give a shit meant that I had to do it for myself. I have been working for five years” (Male, 22)*

## Transport

Young people’s responses about the importance of transport as a key issue varied dramatically based on where the young person lived, either in Melbourne or in a rural area. While transport was most frequently marked as one of the lowest issues for young people in Melbourne, it was a focus of discussion in rural interviews. Limited transport availability in rural areas was seen as a huge barrier to accessing services, education and work.

One young person (Female, 17) spoke about approaching the leaving care age and being offered a lead tenant property, however there was no transport from the property to the two jobs that she currently had and no alternative transport options have not been identified for her. Another young person (Female, 18) stated that she was attending university, however had discontinued her course as she could not afford to pay \$80 per week to travel from her rural area to go to Melbourne to attend while she was homeless.

Young people in rural areas explained that limited public transport options and the significant distances to services, work and education, and the need for them to be independent at 18 years of age, it is essential that they have their driver’s licenses. Barriers that were raised in obtaining a drivers licence included requiring 120 hours, the L2P programs having long waiting lists and the young people don’t have the necessary identification to get a licence. One young person raised that young people with a care background *“may not have anyone in their lives who has a licence, are safe drivers and do not use drugs” (Female, 18)*. Therefore, they may not have people to supervise them to get enough hours as a learner driver.


Young people advised that transport accessibility improvements could include additional funding for driving lessons and DHHS cars being provided that could be used for driving practice.

## Discrimination

Young people described their understanding and experience of discrimination from several angles.

Young people viewed discrimination as having a significant impact on their mental health and wellbeing, and stated that it can lead to social isolation. Young people detailed forms of discrimination that they saw as being prevalent for young people including those based on sexual preferences, being a young parent, sexism, racism, a past criminal history.

Many young people discussed the added complexity of being discriminated against for being in care. Young people believed that they had experienced discrimination in their experiences of out of home care and in connecting with services. One young person (Male, 19) spoke about being



seen as a “kid in care” and felt that this impacted on the way he was viewed by services, potential employers, and property owners and had a significant impact in being able to move on from previous life experiences. Young people felt that the discrimination exists both within the service sector and the general community. One focus group discussed that there needs to be less stigma about asking for help as social issues, such as those listed in this report can affect everyone.

*“Teen pregnancy is not the issue, but rather how society treats it, and the resources that are available to support young parents” (Female, 23)*

*“Discrimination affects a lot of people and should be gone from this world. People discriminate other people and make them feel left out, sad, like they don’t fit into groups or feel criticised” (Female, 15)*

*“Discrimination happens when people are Aboriginal and have to prove their Aboriginal identity if they don’t have particularly dark skin” (Female, 19)*

*“DHS and CSO workers only give opportunities for scholarships to more ‘settled’ young people” (Female, 17)*

*“My brother and I went to same primary school. We avoided each other to avoid questions about why we have different last names and live at different places” (Female, 19)*

A key solution suggested by one young person was to have an education program in schools that teaches young people about discrimination and diversity in the community (Female, 15). One young person advised that gay marriage should be legalised in Australia (Male, 17) and another commented that there needs to be services and resources for young people who identify as LGBTQ.

## Training


Young people raised that they do not feel that they have good awareness of what courses are available to them and what the requirements and steps are to enrolling for these. One young person spoke about the importance of having training that is practical in nature as it can better suit young people in gaining “a good job and experience in life so that they can go further, so that they are not just a kid in care”. Four young people commented that a key improvement would be to have more TAFE courses and Tech schools funded for young people.

## Other Issues

Young people were asked to identify other key issues which had not been identified in the table. The issues have been grouped and discussed below.

## Resources

Two focus groups raised that having limited resources and money can have a huge impact on young people who are trying to “kick start” their lives. The young people interviewed expressed that given their care experience and in particular, the need to become independent at 18 years of age, they require more assistance to get started in life than other young person.



Young people stated that they required more information about where to go when they have no money, recognising that this is required for everything from school, to camps, technology and activities, in addition to their living expenses once they turn 18 years old.

## Young Parents

One focus group expressed that in their rural area, it is quite common for young people with a care experience to become young parents, which adds an additional complexity when living in, or leaving out- of-home care. Young people explained that they do not understand enough about contraception, sexual health, pregnancy, healthy relationships, or how to manage their own needs in addition to those of a child. One young person (Female, 19) stated that when combined with the costs of covering rent, it can be very difficult leaving care and raising a child.

In a metropolitan area, another young person (Female, 23) outlined that she found that being a young parent was not an issue. This young person stated that while she found it challenging, she was able to look after herself whilst leaving care, raising two children, working and studying with effective support and a confident mindset.

One young person (Female, 19) in a rural area would like to see parenting programs targeting young mothers in the local area refunded and awareness raised around these services. In addition to this, she would like to see more support for young parents who have been in care to raise and keep. For example, from pregnancy check-ups, ultra sounds, setting up a house through to encouragement in parenting, protection, contraception and counselling. Another young person (female, 18) advised that there needs to be more rural support for young people who experience pregnancy as a result of sexual exploitation and rape.

## Confidence and Esteem

One young person (Female, 20) believed that a key issue was that young people often don't have enough self-esteem, confidence or self-love, explaining that "*often they love everyone except for themselves*". The impact of this is that it can influence young people's ability to make positive decisions for themselves, to maintain positive mental health and good relationships. A suggested service improvement is to have self-image classes in schools which assist young people to deal with peer pressure, by focussing on being proud and strong as individuals and in building healthy relationships.


## Contact with Birth Family

Young people raised two areas of concern and importance directly affecting those with an out of home care experience. Often young people experience barriers in knowing and having contact with their siblings and extended family during and post care. In addition, young people raised that they need assistance in researching their family history, as a key component of their identity.

## Contact with Services

Each focus group raised the significant role that support services and workers play in their lives and the difference that effective support can make for them. Young people explained that they need workers that they feel they can actually talk to, to feel that workers genuinely hear what they say, are approachable and are well trained.





Young people in one focus group discussed that when they get new workers, their cases are reviewed and this can be problematic when different workers have different perspectives about how things should be managed. One young person (Female, 18) expressed that important information can easily “*fall through the cracks*”, which for them, meant missing out on having access with their father when a worker left their role. Young people in this group did not believe that they had options if they wished to complain about their workers and that their carers may minimise their concerns.

In regards to service improvement, one young person (Female, 17) stated “*they have all of the services; we just need to fix them*”. Young people felt that there are already a lot of services and agencies however they need to be brought together, rather than being separated as this fuels gaps in communication. One focus group discussed that they would like to see a simpler services sector with less workers involved in their lives. One young person (Female, 18) stated that “*we need to have the same worker consistently so that we have a consistent advocate*”.

## Participation and Belonging

The young people interviewed outlined that those with an out of home care experience may struggle to find a sense of purpose and belonging, particularly those with a residential care background. In some respects, the young people interviewed felt connected to their peers and in other ways they felt that their particular needs set them apart and often behind others of a similar age. An example of this was when discussing housing and the additional pressures that those leaving care face at the age of 18 in comparison to many young people who turn 18.

Four young people spoke about not having enough opportunities to speak up and feel heard regarding their lives and issues affecting them. Young people in the rural areas believe that a local CREATE Youth Advisory Group would assist them to connect with one another and to share issues and ideas about things they are facing. Several young people stated that the government should take more opportunities to ask young people what they want and how they believe the service sector would best work for them.

## Areas for change

The young people who were interviewed expressed that they would ultimately like to see all areas improved, however they prioritised mental health and employment as the most important issue in assisting them to set up and succeed in life. Young people commented that they would like to have a bigger voice and more choice about their lives and futures rather than feeling that their futures are dictated by their circumstances or the service sector.

Rural young people advocated strongly that they require more options of programs and services which they could be involved with, while also simplifying the service sector.

Overall the focus groups discussed that they wanted to feel that they were well supported by services, and wanted workers to be consistent and transparent in their work.

## Would you like to be involved

The young people interviewed stated that they were keen to work with the government, the OFY and CREATE to improve the support services available for young people. Young people commented that they could do this through Youth Advisory Groups and meetings with Ministers to share their ideas.





# Conclusion

In total 25 young people participated in focus groups and interviews to provide their views and ideas about what they thought were the important issues affecting young people in three areas of Victoria.

Three issues stood out as being the most important issues for the young people involved, this included mental health, housing and education. Young people under 17 years raised education and mental health most frequently, and older young people (over 18 years) raised mental health and housing as the most immediate issues affecting them and their peers. Rural young people focussed on transport and service accessibility as key areas which affecting many young people.

Overall, most young people spoke about mental health as being the backbone to the many other issues in their lives and discussed that this is a particular issue for those with an out of home care experience. This is evident in the consultation and interviews with 22 out of 25 young people reporting this to be a significant issue. Many young people interviewed saw positive mental health as strongly connecting them to quality of life. In addition, education was frequently seen as being most significantly connected to a young person's future quality of life. Young people stated that, having a smooth transition from care into safe and secure housing, as being paramount to providing them with a base to achieve work, study and other life milestones.

A number of young people reported that they would like to see mental health and education services come together, with increased support in schools to address mental health issues and promote positive wellbeing. While young people in rural areas would like to have increased service choices, they also recognised that transport is a significant issue and saw that a way of managing this would be for services to be provided where they already attend, such as at school or TAFE.

Young people also want greater assistance in planning for their future through simple life skills such as learning how to budget, through to planning their career. Once again, they saw the school environment as being the ideal place for this to occur.

Young people believed that services were difficult to navigate, that there are a lot of workers involved in their lives and that they do not always understand or allow for young people to make their own choices. Young people reported that they would like to see greater consistency across the sector, which would connect to more positive outcomes for young people.

In addition, young people viewed that there were a number of biases which set them apart from other young people, this included from accessing support services to obtaining quality employment. Overall, the participants recognised that as a result of their earlier life and care experiences they had a particular vulnerability and stigma attached to them which meant that they required additional support from services to assist them to develop.

Young people with a care experience expressed that they want to make a positive transition into adulthood and believe that working alongside services which take a long term, practical and consistent approach was pivotal in making this transition.



# Recommendations

Following the completion of this consultation, CREATE recommends the following:

## Mental health

- Additional support is provided to young people as a priority, including more access to free psychology sessions, increased rural accessibility and programs provided through schools.

## Housing

- Increased accessibility of post care housing with decreased waiting lists and increased stability
- Increased accessibility and promotion of life skills programs for young people in the lead up to leaving care

## Education

- Additional programs which address mental health alongside life skills such as, self-image, career and life planning, goal setting, healthy relationship and positive mental health, with access occurring directly through schools.

## Employment

- Increased support for young people who are leaving care to obtain employment in their adolescent years
- Increased availability of jobs which take young people's current mental health into consideration, while also paving the way for a career path
- Programs which connect community minded employers with young people who may have additional barriers to accessing employment

## Training

- Additional places are provided in tech schools and there is a stronger connection between the Out of Home Care sector, education, and training sectors which allows for a more fluid transition for young people into tertiary training programs.

## Discrimination

- Discrimination affecting young people with an Out of home Care experience is addressed from two angles. Firstly, within the Out of Home Care sector, young people are treated as individuals and are supported to develop their identity without prejudice. This requires sector education regarding LGBTQ, multiculturalism and other areas which affect young people's accessibility and engagement with services. Secondly, there is increased education for both the service sector and broader community about young people with a care experience which encourages their participation by community members.

## Alcohol and Drugs

- Education offered to young people to firstly, provide them with skills to manage dynamics where they may be encouraged to use, and secondly, to assist them to minimise harm while using.



## Transport

Young people advised that transport accessibility improvements could include additional funding for driving lessons and DHHS cars being provided that could be used for driving practice.

- Increased support, particularly in rural areas, to assist young people to obtain their drivers licenses
- Myki cards with funds for young people leaving care to access support services, Psychology sessions and education.



# Appendices

## Appendix 1

### List of Questions asked to young people

Questions were taken from the Non-Government Consultation Guide

#### Issues identified by young people

**Education** – especially the quality of schools, improving the educational achievements of young people and supporting young people as they transition into further education.

**Employment** - especially the level of youth unemployment in Victoria and the difficulties for young people entering the job market.

**Training** – especially rebuilding TAFEs, improving training's responsiveness to industry needs and strengthening the quality of training available.

**Mental Health** – especially the delivery of services and standards across all acute and community mental health settings and expanding the Safe Schools Program to support same-sex-attracted and gender-diverse students

**Alcohol and drugs** – especially binge drinking and alcohol-related violence and reducing the use of ice.

**Discrimination** – especially the importance of promoting community harmony, celebrate diversity and multiculturalism and support women's full economic and social participation.

**Housing** – especially the availability of social housing, homelessness and the affordability of housing for young people.

**Transport** – especially improving public transport so that it is more available and accessible for young people.

#### Questions:

How important are the issues listed above to you? (number these in order of importance from 1= most important, 8 = least important)


Thinking about the issue you selected as the most important issue to you. Why do you think this is the most important issue?

Is there anything else you want to tell us about these issues?

Are there other issues that are important to you that are not in the list?

Thinking about all of the issues, which would you like to see government taking action on? This could be in the form of changing the law, offering new or better programs or services, or doing things differently.

What do you think the government could do to tackle the issues you identified above?



What do you think is the most important action that the government should take for each of these objectives?

List up to three other actions you think the government should take

### Co-design

There is an opportunity for young people to be involved in the design and implementation of the Youth Policy Framework. Co-design is much more than asking young people for feedback or undertaking consultation or satisfaction surveys. Opportunities for co-designing the new youth policy will mean that young people will:

- work in partnership with government
- have a real and ongoing voice at the table
- have an equal say about what young people want to achieve as well as what government want to achieve
- be involved in the planning, development and implementation of solutions that work for all young people

### Questions

Would you be interested in working alongside government to tackle youth issues?

In what ways would you be interested in working alongside government?

- ☐ Input into policies and programs
- ☐ Participate on advisory groups
- ☐ Work with community organisations
- ☐ Take action with your friends/community/school
- ☐ Other



## Appendix 2

### Further recommendations from young people

#### Mental health

- Additional support is provided to young people as a priority, including more access to free psychology sessions, increased rural accessibility and programs provided through schools.

#### Housing

- Increased accessibility of post care housing with decreased waiting lists and increased stability.
- Focus on education for the wider community to encourage landlords to rent properties to first time renters or those leaving care.
- A government scheme where insurance is provided against property damage for young people leaving care.
- More readily accessible transitional housing and lead tenant options for young people leaving care
- Assistance for young people to be integrated into the community through work, study and community programs once they obtain housing

#### Education

- Additional programs which address mental health alongside life skills such as, self-image, career and life planning, goal setting, healthy relationship and positive mental health, with access to occur directly through schools.
- More readily available career guidance and planning
- Increased availability of realistic jobs based on young people's current mental health needs, whilst also planning for their future career goals. For example, having the option to work part- time and increase responsibilities as the young person develops their confidence
- Increasing education and incentives for potential employers about the needs of young people with an out of home care experience
- One focus group informed that they would prefer word of mouth or to be given the details of employers to approach them directly about work rather than being connected to an employment agency
- Increasing opportunities to gain work experience
- Developing a program which connects young people to community minded employers so that they can network as a way to broaden employment opportunities
- Employment mentors who focus on what young people want to do, provides advice and practical support, such as sitting with young people as they call employers
- For general employment agency workers to provide more intensive support, such as is offered by disability employment services
- For young people to have resumes compiled professionally and with accurate information
- Education program in schools which teach young people about stigmas, discrimination and diversity in the community, multiculturalism, LBGQT, care experience etc.

#### Employment

- Increased support services for young people who are leaving care to obtain employment

- Increased availability of jobs which take young people's current mental health into consideration, while also paving the way for a career path
- Programs which connect community minded employers with young people who may have additional barriers to accessing employment

### Training

- Additional places are provided in tech schools and the development of stronger connections between the out of home care sector, education, and training sectors which allows for a fluid transition for young people into tertiary training programs.

### Discrimination

- Discrimination affecting young people with an out of home care experience is addressed from two angles. Firstly, within the out of home care sector, young people are treated as individuals and are supported to develop their identity without stigma. This requires sector education regarding Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual/transgender, (LGBTQTR) multiculturalism and other areas which affect young people's accessibility and engagement with services. Secondly, there is increased education for both the service sector and broader community about young people with a care experience which helps to decrease the stigma many young people in care face.

### Alcohol and Drugs

- Harm minimisation education offered to young people to provide them with skills to manage situations where they may be encouraged to use, and to assist them to minimise harm while using.

### Transport

- Increased support, particularly in rural areas, to assist young people to obtain their drivers licenses
- Provide public transport cards (Myki) with funds for young people leaving care to access support services, psychology sessions and education.

### Other Issues

#### Resources

- Increased assistance required to assist care leavers to get started in life

#### Young Parents

- Provision of support to rural young parents in relation to contraception, sexual health, pregnancy, healthy relationships, or how to manage their own needs in addition to those of a child.
- Funding required to support rural program targeted at young mothers.
- Additional support provided to young parents who have been in care to raise and keep their children. Support programs to include pregnancy check-ups, ultra sounds, setting up a house through to encouragement in parenting, protection, contraception and counselling.
- Rural support services required to support young people who experience pregnancy as a result of sexual exploitation and rape.



### Confidence and Esteem

- Provision of programs in school which aim to improvement self-image, life skills to deal with peer pressure and in building healthy relationships.

### Contact with Birth Family

- Support provided to young people to have contact with their siblings and extended family during and post care
- Assistance and support provided to young people in assisting them to research their family history.

### Contact with Services

- Young people want workers who they can talk with and feel that the workers genuinely hear what they say, are approachable and are well trained.
- Young people want workers to be transparent and to provide information to them about their lives and their futures.
- Clear complaints processes which are young people friendly and easily accessible.
- Development of a simpler service sector with less numbers of workers involved in young people's lives.

### Participation and Belonging

- Development and funding of rural CREATE Youth Advisory Group to assist isolated young people to connect with one another and to share issues and ideas about things they are facing.
- Ensure rural young people in care have the opportunities to share their views and opinions with government and ministers, service providers and support agencies.