

Report calls for children and young people in out-of-home care to have a greater say in their future

8 August: Sydney, Australia A new report released by the NSW Advocate for Children and Young People, Zoë Robinson, calls for greater safety, accountability, support and transparency in the Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) system.

Ms Robinson said, “While this report makes a series of critical recommendations in relation to improving how we support children and young people throughout their journey in the care system, the overwhelming call from young people in the report was incredibly simple – they want to be heard.”

As one young person who participated in the Advocate’s research said, *“You need to listen. You honestly need to listen to what a young person’s got to say.”*

There are currently over 15,000 children and young people in care in NSW. As a result of a range of social and economic factors, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are almost 10 times more likely to be in OOHC than non-Indigenous children and young people.

The Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP) heard from 99 children and young people aged from six to 24 years who have experience of the OOHC system in NSW.

Ms Robinson said she was confronted by the findings in this report. “What is clear is that we are not consistently listening or providing a place for children and young people in care to be heard about all the decisions that affect their lives.”

“I was saddened to read about the experiences of these strong and resilient, but vulnerable, children and young people. As a collective, we must do better, and it starts with listening,” Ms Robinson added.

The report reveals one young person had lived in 44 different placements, while another young person reported having 20 placements during their time in care, none of which lasted more than six months.

One of the key findings is that children and young people living in OOHC often feel completely excluded from critical decisions affecting their lives. They are often left out of court proceedings and case meetings only to be informed of key outcomes after the fact.

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A participant in this study said, “Young people should be included in their case meetings and rights to their decisions and learn about what’s going on in their life...I don’t think I remember ever going to a case meeting until it was the one three weeks before turning 18 about leaving care.”

Since 2015 there have been numerous reports and inquiries into the OOHC system in NSW. While the information in this report is not new, it is clear the system can improve.

Ms Robinson calls for government to continue to not only listen to children and young people but to act on what they are saying.

“When designing programs, roads and healthcare systems we always include the voice and perspective of consumers, the same should happen in this space. Children and young people who have had experience of the out-of-home care system should be meaningfully involved in designing and developing policies, programs, solutions and supports, to ensure the experience of other children and young people is improved,” Ms Robinson said.

The *Voices of Children and Young People in Out-of Home Care Report* outlines 19 recommendations and accompanying actions for government to implement to help improve the lives of some of the most vulnerable children and young people in NSW. This includes actions aimed at better supporting families, enhancing children and young people’s voice whilst they are in OOHC, and ensuring that young people are provided with holistic supports upon exit.

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For more information or to arrange an interview with the Advocate for Children and Young People please contact: Una O’Neill on 0491 224 049.