

# News Release



**“I don’t think anyone should live in a motel. Especially a kid”: children and young people say ACAs are not appropriate care placements or arrangements, nor is the system functioning for them.**

**5 August 2024**

Today, the NSW Advocate for Children and Young People, Ms Zoë Robinson, will table the report [\*Moving cage to cage: Final Report of the Special Inquiry into children and young people in alternative care arrangements\*](#), to NSW Parliament.

In September 2023, the Advocate launched a Special Inquiry into children and young people in alternative care arrangements (ACAs\*) to understand the experiences of those children and young people in their own words. This is the first Special Inquiry undertaken by the Advocate.

“As Advocate, my role is to raise the voices of children and young people to government, business, and the community. As a result, the core focus of the Special Inquiry was to understand the lived experience of children and young people in their own words and to ensure that those voices are placed squarely at the centre of future work undertaken to reform the out-of-home care (OOHC) system in NSW,” said Ms Robinson.

During the course of the Special Inquiry, 21 children and young people aged 10 – 23 years participated in private hearings, and 21 submissions were received from interested parties, including from DCJ, non-government organisations, individuals and young people. In addition, the Special Inquiry team undertook desktop research and hosted two workshops with researchers, academic stakeholders and caseworkers.

The key impacts of these arrangements heard through private hearings, workshops, submissions and other evidence include:

- Instability;
- Lack of continuity, supervision and poor standard of care;
- Inappropriate accommodation and living environments;
- Disruption to education;
- Lack of access to therapeutic supports; and
- Isolation and disconnection from friends, family, community and culture.

Ms Robinson said, “It is my view that the children and young people placed in ACAs are at significant risk of experiencing negative short and long-term impacts, which can lead to further complexities as they grow and develop.”

When asked what they would have complained about if they knew that they were able to make a complaint, one young person said, “Everything, every bit of it”. Another young person, when referring to their ACA caseworker said “They wouldn't really [look after me]. They'd just be doing their own thing. They'd let me just roam off. They wouldn't care. I'd go missing, they wouldn't report me missing for sometimes two weeks, three weeks.”

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As of 30 June 2023, there were 118 children and young people in ACAs, including 26 children and young people in hotels and motels, 37 in serviced apartments and 55 in short-term rentals including caravan parks.

The report reflects the overwhelming evidence that ACAs are not appropriate care placements or living arrangements for children and young people. This evidence comes directly from the lived experience of children and young people and is consistent with a number of written submissions received.

In the words of a young person who participated in a private hearing, “I don’t think anyone should live in a motel. Especially a kid. Especially the little 9-year-olds that you see...I was 10, but I’ve heard of like younger kids than 10 going into them and like, I just wouldn’t be able to see it.” Another young person recounted their experience, saying “It was just me on my own around like full grown adults on drugs, homeless people, people with mental illnesses, like it was disgusting.”

Ms Robinson said, “The use of ACA accommodation should not be continued, and there needs to be an immediate focus on transitioning away from these types of arrangements as a matter of priority.”

“We must always place the needs and outcomes of children and young people first. No child or young person should be unsafe or without care and compassion in their daily lives, and they should be included in decisions that impact them.”

Ms Robinson added, “without their voices, this report would not have had the impact that it has had. This was an opportunity for their voices to be heard and for us, now as a community, to consider how we want to care for some of our most vulnerable.”

“It is clear to me that now is the time to enact positive, long-lasting change. Children and young people do not ask for much, in circumstances where they could legitimately ask much more of the system that is designed to care for them. But they do seek safety, stability, and love.”

**ENDS**

*\*ACAs includes the use of hotels, motels and other settings for emergency out-of-home care (OOHC) placements.*

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