

**Submission  
No 29**

## **CHILD PROTECTION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SYSTEM**

**Organisation:** Department of Communities and Justice, Youth Consult for Change

**Date Received:** 11 December 2020

## Background

*Youth Consult for Change* is a youth advisory and leadership program that engages young people aged 14 – 25 years from across NSW who have a lived experience of out of home care. Their life and care experiences are diverse and consultants have had caseworkers from, and been case managed by, both the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) and Funded Service Providers (FSP).

The young people come together every six weeks to consult on a range of programs, initiatives and services designed or reviewed by DCJ for the sector. The program produces a project each year that aims to create change and improve the experience of other children and young people in care. Many of the consultants also speak at training and professional events.

The young people are supported to grow, develop and practice their leadership, advocacy and communication skills through facilitated experiential learning opportunities, mentoring and peer support.

The program is coordinated by the Office of the Senior Practitioner (OSP), a unit within DCJ.

## The submission

Upon the encouragement of office of NSW Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services and at the invitation of the Parliamentary Committee on Children and Young People; *Youth Consult for Change* puts forward this submission to the parliamentary inquiry into the child protection and social services system.

Although the contributions from youth consultants have been coordinated by Department of Communities and Justice staff members, the recommendations and information outlined in this submission represent the views of youth consultants from *Youth Consult for Change* only and should be credited for all content.

Two youth consultants volunteered to participate in a consultation to inform this submission, they are aged 20 and 23.

This submission was written by the Youth Consult for Change program co-ordinator; however it primarily uses direct quotes from a two hour recorded discussion with the young people. The program coordinator asked the young people a number of questions drafted from the NSW Parliament Committee for Children and Young People's (the Committee) terms of reference (TOR).

The purpose of making the submission in this format is to bring children and young people's voices and experiences directly to the Committee. All direct quotes are in italics.

The program coordinator has added background and analysis based on knowledge of the youth consultant's stories and experience supporting and advocating for many of the youth consultants at different point in their leaving and aftercare journeys.

Key issues raised for reflection and consideration.

Over the course of the consultation the youth consultants identified a number of key issues that they wanted the Committee to consider.

**Recommendation one:** Early intervention work must involve building relationships with children and young people so workers can understand their experiences, perspectives and feelings of safety and make the best possible assessments and decisions about whether they are safe and the type of support their family needs to care for them well and keep them safe.

**Recommendation two:** Being taken from their parents and separated from siblings is scary, overwhelming and confusing no matter the circumstances. More could be done to provide support to children and young people to understand and process what has happened, what is happening and what might happen in the future.

**Recommendation three:** Relationships based and intensive leaving care support and extended care programs should be recognised and funded as vital early intervention support for young people as they transition out of care and into independence.

**Recommendation four:** Services that interact with or provide support to vulnerable children, young people and their families need to have the resources (staff, funding and permission) to allow staff to spend enough time with children and young people to build meaningful relationships. Good relationships are a powerful early intervention tool because they protect children and young people and prepare them to meet life's challenges.

**Recommendation five:** Schools and school teachers have both a responsibility and an incredible opportunity to identify and respond to children and young people who are experiencing abuse or neglect. They need good support, training and permission to ask children what is happening at home. They must have the knowledge and confidence to respond and act appropriately when they believe, become aware or are told by a child that they are being abused or neglected at home.

**Recommendation six:** GPs, Aboriginal and community health services offer an opportunity for children and young people to have safe and ongoing relationships in the local community. They can provide information about local services and make well-informed and appropriate referrals, based on relationships and a good knowledge of the child or young person's history. It is important that these health services are funded and supported to provide good quality care for vulnerable children and young people.

**Recommendation seven:** Being connected with and having access to well trained psychologists, therapists or counsellors who specialise in supporting kids who have experienced abuse, neglect and trauma should be standard practice and offered regularly to children and young people in care. Flexibility needs to be given in the way services are funded and allocated to allow children and young people to find the right psychologist for them, at the right time.

**Recommendation eight:** A broad range of therapeutic activities should be funded, encouraged and recognised as therapeutic interventions for children and young people who have experienced trauma or have diverse abilities and needs. Animal, art and music therapies, or spending time with local elders and being immersed in culture can be both immensely healing and protective for kids.

**Recommendation nine:** Caseworkers need smaller caseloads to be able to build relationships and spend enough time with kids to get to know them. Strategies to address staff turnover need to be considered and implemented so that children and young people don't have to build relationships with multiple workers.

**Recommendation ten:** Services like the police who are responding to serious and challenging issues of abuse and neglect need to make sure that they have the right training, and appropriate funding to employ people with the skills to support kids through this process. TO explained how these services can come in and shake up their lives, memories and emotions in the course of doing their job and then they leave and the child is left to process what happened.

## Submission

**Question one:** How does DCJ and other services support (or not) vulnerable children and families – what are any potential improvements, particularly at important transition points in their lives?

LQ and TO identified that early intervention work with their parents did not occur or it was not sufficient to support their parent's needs.

### 1. Early intervention prior to entering care

LQ was 12 years old when she came into care and has no memory of DCJ (then DOCS) intervention with her family prior to this;

*I didn't have any idea who DOCS were prior to the day I got removed. So that was my first recall of any actual intervention at all. It was just removal.*

*I never had anyone come and speak to me about it. I never had any inkling that my parents were having meetings. You know how normally before removal, you are having family intensive services, or those intervention workers, I never experienced any of that. So, prior to the day we got removed, I don't feel that there was any actual work done on the ground.'*

TO was six or seven when she came into care and had DCJ intervention as long as she can remember;

*They were involved my whole life, basically. We had been temporarily removed multiple times. At one point, we had caseworker's coming and drug testing our mom randomly in the house for a year, tested over 30 times or something in a year to make sure that she wasn't on drugs. It shouldn't have taken seven years to remove us permanently.*

*Yes, they did remove us, and they did take us away at other times, but they also left us, despite all the past evidence that it would recur again and again. I don't think they gave enough support [mum] to be a good parent. Nothing excuses what she did, but she kind of needed that support.*

LQ felt that the child protection system did not do enough to understand what was actually happening in her home. She did not feel that DCJ intervened to protect her and her siblings after she made disclosures of sexual abuse against people that her parents let into their lives.

*I was eight when I made the first disclosures. I made statements and stuff. I had been through court to as a child, to help put someone in jail, you know, it wasn't unknown to people. I had meetings around this thing, I spoke to the school counsellor. There's no doubt they would have had knowledge about it. And I just feel like they just kept waiting and waiting. I feel like for me to be not in care for up to twelve years of my life - why would it take another four years to then go, this is still not a safe space. Like it was evident that even after that (the court proceedings), things hadn't changed.*

*Us kids would protect our parents. So we wouldn't say anything bad about our parents, just the people that our parents let into our lives. So there was a lot of stuff that went on behind closed doors that they still wouldn't know about. But besides that, the mere fact that my parents couldn't protect us from the other people should be enough to show that these kids have gone through ten years of their life of sexual abuse, assault. Why would you leave them with people that can't protect them.*

LQ was already speaking out. This was a missed opportunity to meaningfully connect with a child who was already brave enough to talk about what was happening to them and testify in court. She would likely have spoken about what else was happening at home if someone had been genuinely interested in her experiences, listened to her and taken the time to build a trusting relationship.

#### **Recommendation one**

Early intervention work must involve building relationships with children and young people so workers can understand their experiences, perspectives and feelings of safety and make the best possible assessments and decisions about whether they are safe and the type of support their family needs to care for them well and keep them safe.

## **2. Gaps in support for children before, during and after removal**

Neither LQ nor TO felt appropriately supported, before, during or after they were taken from their parent's care, to understand what was happening and what might happen moving forward.

In regards to the actual removal, both young people had police involvement. For TO this was not unusual because she was familiar with the police. For LQ, police being present was intimidating.

TO said;

*I got taken around six or seven and before that my sister and I were basically on a first name basis with police, that's how often they visited. The night it all happened, it was kind of just an ordinary night. The police showed up, they said hey, we knew them, they knew us. They drove us like five houses down the road. To our mom's boyfriend's mom's house. We stayed the night there, then people came and picked us up and then we stayed in the office.*

LQ said;

*I remember it like it was yesterday, it's kind of something it's not easy to just shift from your mind. I came home from being away on a shopping trip into town. I came back and the police and the DOCS workers were at our door ready to take us.*

*It was very intimidating. It created a sense of fear towards police as well because of the way that we were removed. It was a sense of intimidation, all the hush hush, the standing between my mom and I. The way that they stood, it was like they were ready for my parents to put up a fight, which my parents didn't.*

In regards to DCJs (previously DOCS) work with them throughout the process, neither young person remembered having support from caseworkers to understand what was happening or to create a sense of safety for them prior to removal. Both felt that they were not included or treated as active participants in the process at these huge moments of change in their lives.

Although TO was young, she believes that workers could have explained things to her so that she had some sense of what was happening or what might happen;

*We had temporary placements leading up to being permanently removed. But we didn't know what it was, we kind of just thought it was a holiday. Because we didn't go to school, we didn't do anything. I had no idea what it was. It was kind of just like a holiday with people somewhere. Yeah, we genuinely had no clue what it was.*

*I know I was young, but at the same time I knew I wasn't with my mom, and I knew that I wasn't with her for like a few months. I didn't know what was going on. Some of the time she was in jail. So, yeah, I mean, it was confusing.*



*When I first got put into care, it was kinship care, I went with family. So I just assumed that we would stay with family for a while until we went home. I didn't have an idea of what was actually going on. And then when we started moving to different people we didn't know, that's what it was like, oh well this is weird.*

*Any type of explanation to understand why, because even when we first got permanently put in care, it was never really made abundantly clear that we weren't ever going back. No one really ever said, look, until you're older, you can't go back.*

Although LQ was older when she came into, she also felt that workers did not take the time or have the skills to include her in the process in a way that would have made it easier for her to understand and process what was happening;

*It was just one of those things where it was a fear factor from the get go because of the way that I was initially introduced to DOCS. Then at the time had a caseworker who just talked down to me. One, she would talk to me in a way that I couldn't actually understand what she saying, and I'm a cluey person, so she was talking like high level language. But two she would treat me as a child. She would hide the nitty gritty and tell us that we're going away for the weekend, and that would come back to our family later on.*

This had a significant impact on both young people's sense of trust in the child protection system and the people who worked for DCJ. When kids do not trust the organisation or its workers, they will be less likely to tell people when something isn't right or if they are feeling unsafe.

TO reflected;

*I feel like there's no protecting the kid from the information because like we're living it anyway. The only thing that's missing is you actually being honest with us, like we already know that something's going on. We probably have a rough idea of what's going on. It makes you mistrust people a lot because, like no one tells you anything, so you feel like, can you actually trust authorities? It certainly ruins that trust in the higher up people, like you really just feel like you've got yourself.*

## **Recommendation two**

Being taken from their parents and separated from siblings is scary, overwhelming and confusing no matter the circumstances. However, children are not oblivious to their own experiences. They know what has happened to them at home and they know that something is happening when they are taken. However they are often not supported to understand and process this in an age appropriate way, or included in conversations about what might happen in the future. Often kids are left to process these emotions and big changes themselves.

*I knew I didn't want to be with my parents, but it was still scary because I was separated from my siblings as well, and being the eldest sister, I had a sense of needing to be there for them. I lost my sense of who I was when we all got split up.*  
(LQ)

More could be done to provide support to children and young people to understand and process what has happened, what is happening and what might happen in the future. To do this LQ identified that workers need lower caseloads so that they have the time to invest in these relationships and conversations with children.

### **3. Gaps in leaving and after care support**

One of the key issues identified by LQ as a gap in early intervention for young people in care is proactive leaving and after care support. Good support and planning with young people can help make sure that they have the right skills and support in place during critical adolescent years characterised by major life transitions such as high school ending and turning 18, which in turn will likely reduce their need to access crisis support in the first few years after leaving care, and as parents themselves if and when they have children.

*I had an Aboriginal aftercare worker that helped out during my transition from care, which was good to have but I look now and there was probably still some gaps, because she only came in like a month before I turned 18. My leaving care plan got done three weeks before I turned 18, and that's when I met her. She was really good in helping me out when I was that space of moving out. But that's where I see that the big gap is, those supports coming in too late.*

*Yeah, it was good having her there during that time, but it was also too late. There wasn't the groundwork that would have been effective for me to learn those independent living skills, or to understand adult responsibilities, or prepare for the pressure and expectation that comes as soon as you turn 18 and how to work with that.*

*That's why I'm such an advocate for mentoring or coaching for young people 15 through to 21. Because I can tell you now, a lot of the young people that turn 18, that's when the wheels fall off. And if you haven't met them and built a relationship before turning 18, it's like picking up the pieces, instead of putting in place the strategies. Being able to prepare for situations in case if it does happen, it makes such a huge difference.*

LQ works as a youth development coach on a pilot program supporting young people 15-21 as they prepare to leave care and then to navigate that transitional space between 18-21. As both a young person who experienced the leaving and aftercare systems, and as a professional working in that space, she is uniquely able to share both a personal and professional perspective on the gaps and benefits.

*I am one hundred percent for young people transitioning out of care having the extended care space and having youth development coaches. And that's not me being biased to the fact that I work in the role but just that I would have loved to have had someone like that in my life and because I see the real changes that come with having that support. Instead of burning all my victims comp on rent, I could have had support to understand what it meant to not have someone stuff me over in a rental. Yes, there's a point where we need to learn the hard lessons in life. But those lessons didn't need to be learnt that way, if the information and support was there, I could have made different decisions.*

LQs personal and professional experience has been that caseworkers do not have the time and often the ongoing relationships with young people to adequately support them to prepare for adulthood and independent living. Young people need workers who know their specific strengths and needs, so

they can help them understand both the skills and support they will need when they turn 18 to navigate adult responsibilities and manage the various challenges and continual changes that come up.

*The young people I work with now say caseworkers walk in, say let me have a look at your room and say, OK goodbye. They're just basically spies, that's how they describe it, that's how it feels to them. Just someone to spy if things are going OK in the home or not and asks a few questions and then walk out and then come back a month later.*

*So the biggest thing I hear from the young people is that they don't feel like their caseworkers exist. And I didn't feel like the caseworker I had before turning 18 existed either. I remember the day he gave me the independent living checklist and asked me to fill it out. He didn't actually help me fill it out or go through it. And I remember reading thinking, this is above me.*

*He even gave me the leaving care template instead of sitting and going through it, and just said add anything that you want. I was like what in the world is this. And then two years after turning 18, I applied to get my leaving care plan amended, but it took me two years of fighting to get that approved and changed because the previous one didn't reflect me, because that caseworker didn't know me and I didn't know what to put in it.*

*That's why I think having those roles in place where it is about really supporting young people. If the caseworker role is about meeting the nitty gritty stuff and all the legislative stuff, then you need someone else who can connect with the young person before turning 18. These people are already in the space for the next part of the journey. I personally see that it works quite well because it means that it's ticking off all the boxes. It's giving the young people the emotional support, the ability to grow, to have someone that supports them towards their goals and aspirations, getting to know them on a ground level. Someone who can willingly give three hours, or be there a few times a week if need be. If there's a crisis, they can be there every day kind of thing. It's a team effort and it takes some off that pressure caseworkers as well.*

*But I think the biggest thing is we also work alongside them to do the leaving care plans. I feel like if I had that, I would have come out with a very different, clearer mentality about what I wanted to do, because it is like working through and identifying goals. If it is that they like baking, we include cake piping courses in their plan. Just those little things like that mean a lot to young people.*

TO agreed;

*I think that as a whole, before leaving care, kids should be given like support on how to cook and how to manage your money and just basic things like that. They need to know how to survive on their own because for some kids, the day they turn 18, they're not going to have a home to live in.*

**Recommendation three**

Relationships based and intensive leaving care support and extended care programs should be recognised and funded as vital early intervention support for young people as they transition out of care and into independence.

**Questions two:** How do DCJ, health services, teacher/school, police and justice work together to make things better for children and families experiences challenges?

The young people didn't really have a sense of services working together for them or their family, however they did experience different services or professionals as helpful and unhelpful at different times in their lives.

Both TO and LQ identified people within the service system who made a difference in their lives including caseworkers, teachers, GPs and Aboriginal health workers, psychologists, carers and police officers. The underlying thread in these stories was people's ability to show genuine care, build a meaningful and respectful relationship with them and their capacity to be involved over long periods of time.

*The biggest problem is a lot of young people get put in a box. I was a good kid. But I used to have to lie to get what I needed or wanted. That was probably the most unethical thing I did as a child, like I wasn't misbehaving or anything, but I had a lot of trauma response stuff where I wouldn't talk to people. So no one actually knew who I was truly as a person because I would just hide, they would only see the mask. And so building those connections (with teachers and caseworkers) and building proper love for my foster family and trust for them as well, that really shifted how I started seeing my experience.*

These relationships are important because as LQ highlights, they have the potential to have a big impact on a child or young person's life and sense of self.

*I had a really good caseworker and he worked with me for a couple of years. We still see each other around now and yarn. But he was just really on the ground with me and he respected me the whole time, and he was honest with me. He was just what a caseworker should look like. And he was one of those people that went above and beyond. He played such a significant role in making me feel safe in the system after feeling so much distrust in the system. He was the one that changed that for me.*

*To just have someone for a few years that actually made me feel heard, it was really good. To have someone that literally has always believed in me and always gone, you're going to make something of yourself one day, that they could see it from the get go made a difference.*

#### **Recommendation four**

Services that interact with or provide support to vulnerable children, young people and their families need to have the resources (staff, funding and permission) to allow staff to spend enough time with children and young people to build meaningful relationships. Good relationships are a powerful early intervention tool because they protect children and young people and prepare them to meet life's challenges.

#### **1. School and teachers**

LQ had good relationships with some of her teachers and felt safe enough to talk to them about some of the things happening in her home.

*I had some trusted teachers in primary school. I had two teachers that I really trusted. So that was really helpful for me to work through some of the things I was going through and to be actually open to talking about it. It's not something you just easily talk about.*

However, she didn't feel like appropriate or timely action was taken;

*I definitely feel like the school didn't do enough, because it was it was known to the teachers. I went through sexual abuse all my childhood and it was known to the teachers because I had spoken to a trusted one or two teachers and I feel like they were very much aware of it. On top of that, they knew we were rocking up to school and getting sent home every week with head lice and, you know we smelt really really bad, we were in poor condition. Like we it was obvious visually, you could see the neglect.*

*I definitely feel like they could have done more, it was very obvious that our needs weren't being met. And when we were living in that town, it was the longest we lived somewhere, we had been in this place from year two to years seven, they knew us.*

TO also thought that the school should have been in a better position to notice that she was not being cared for well by her mum and to support to an early intervention.

*Like I don't think before I went into care I talked to anyone about what was happening with me, but I'm pretty sure people could tell, like it's pretty hard to miss. The kid who hasn't been to school in weeks, like my attendance was so bad at school that I repeated kindergarten, like the easiest possible year, to repeat just because I did not attend school.*

Teachers are often the adults who see and know children most outside of their home, and children often trust their teacher's. LQ made purposeful decisions about talking to her teachers because she hoped they would be able to do something to help.

*I did play a part in the reasons why we were moved because I was talking to mandatory reporters. The information I was telling them, I knew that they would have to tell someone, then something would have to be done. I knew that if I told the right people, like schoolteachers and counsellors and stuff, things could get done.*

Given the position teachers hold in children's lives, TO identified how important it is for them to have access to expert support and advice so they can provide the best response to the kids who trust them.

*I think a lot of people don't know how to deal with kids that have gone through all of that because most people don't experience half of that in my lifetime. So it's like they probably have not a single idea how to deal with it or what that kid needs.*

*If teachers have people they can call, people who actually deal with people who have been sexually assaulted, people who can deal with people who have been abused, if they can actually have someone they can talk to about how they can help the child in different ways helping the child find ways to cope and what they can.*

#### **Recommendation five**

Schools and school teachers have both a responsibility and an incredible opportunity to identify and respond to children and young people who are experiencing abuse or neglect. They need good support, training and permission to ask children what is happening at home. They must have the knowledge and confidence to respond and act appropriately when they believe, become aware or a told by a child that they are being abused or neglected at home.

## **2. GPs and Specialised health services**

TO spoke about the important role her GP played referring her to appropriate services to meet her needs. These referrals were based in a good knowledge of her history, an ongoing relationship and knowledge of her needs.

*I've got a really good GP now. I've known her quite a long time, actually, like a good couple of years, so she knows, like basically my entire life history, she knows everything so she's pretty good. She's been with me when I had to really start seeing more psychologists and like she's the one who helped find a good psychologist.*

*The good psychologists I've had were found through our doctor. She found people who specifically deal with kids who have been abused so we could have the support that I needed, that would actually help me get through what I was going through. I think my doctor was pretty cool, we do like her she knows everything. I think doctors are really good because they can find people specifically for those kind of things.*

For LQ being linked in with Aboriginal health workers (and caseworkers) made a big difference because she felt better understood and that they were able to connect on a different level.



*I think eventually we started going to like Aboriginal GPs, which I find a lot more easy going and respectful. Versus just generic quick in and out. Having a really good Aboriginal health care worker and my caseworker was an Aboriginal caseworker too which made a difference. It's just the way that they would connect on a different level and be really grounded with me as well.*

#### **Recommendation six**

GPs, Aboriginal and community health services offer an opportunity children and young people to have with safe and ongoing relationships in the local community. They can provide information about local services and make well-informed and appropriate referrals, based on relationships and a good knowledge of the child or young person's history. It is important that these health services are funded and supported to provide good quality care for vulnerable children and young people.

### **3. Mental health and psychological support services**

Both young people found that having psychological support helped them immensely to process their experiences, develop skills to manage their mental health and trauma responses and move forward.

However, finding the right psychologist and being able to choose who and when is really important.

LQ said;

*I feel I had good mental health supports in place sort of, like I've always had counsellors since I was a kid, some better than others. I know that like if I didn't like one, I just wouldn't go back.*

*A key support was a counsellor I had from year eight to 10. She was seeing me in the school, but she was appointed by DCJ. She was a psychologist. That's when I got diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, so she was in the space of seeing a lot of that and working through strategies around that with me. She listened and she advocated quite significantly for me to also get those supports and to get a psychological review.*

TO identified that having long term and ongoing relationships with psychologists were particularly important. The service system must work together to support these relationships when they exist.

*My sister has seen a psychologist her whole life, she has known us longer than we can remember her, like this lady knows our whole life. She knows everything that's ever happened to us. And she has been able to help in more ways than anyone else.*

*Eventually, like I found a few good psychologists who actually deal with, like certain aspects of my life that I went through, who know how to help people who've gone through that. It's very good to have services like that that you can access, people who can actually tell you what's going on. Like I have had people say oh, you're fine, let's just do these breathing exercises, just think about this instead. Whereas like these guys, they know where your head is at that moment. Like they know it's technically not in that room. They know that you're not here, they know what you need to do to get out of that headspace, and they know that you need to do this and they can tell you how you can do that every day.*

#### **Recommendation seven**

Being connected with and having access to well training psychologists, therapists or counsellors who specialise in supporting kids who have experienced abuse, neglect and trauma should be standard practice and offered regularly to children and young people in care. Flexibility needs to be given in the way services are funded and allocated to allow children and young people to find the right psychologist for them, at the right time. Services should work together to prioritise maintaining these therapeutic relationships by making sure that ongoing funding is available and that if kids move they are supported to continue seeing the same person.

#### **4. Alternate therapies**

LQ suggestion that psychology isn't right for everyone and that alternatives are not always available in funding packages.

*Sometimes young people don't want to access that type of therapeutic support, so what about alternative therapies? You know, like doing things like drumming or going horse riding could be what grounds them to a whole other level or going out bush. You know, like bringing in options that doesn't have to be a westernized version of therapeutic, like a psychologist or counsellor.*

TO who has autism identified that;

*A lot of autistic people, they need things like that. Having access to those therapies and other options would be good. Some people find that horse riding, drawing, writing or playing an instrument really helps them.*

#### **Recommendation eight**

A broad range of therapeutic activities should be funded, encouraged and recognised as therapeutic interventions for children and young people who have experienced trauma or have diverse abilities and needs. Animal, art and music therapies, or spending time with local elders and being immersed in culture can be both immensely healing and protective for kids.

#### **5. DCJ and Funded Service Providers (FSP)**

LQ identified on a number of occasions that the caseworkers from both DCJ and funded service providers (FSP, or NGO) did not see young people often enough to build relationships with them or develop trust. This impacts on the level or depth of support they can provide to children and young people.

*I did overall have a positive experience with my NGO. Other than the fact of my leaving and aftercare stuff taking so long and it not being prioritized the way it should have been. Even though I barely saw a caseworker or anything, I think I was in such a loving and safe, caring space that it didn't matter to me. But I know that it could have been a bit different if I was in a situation where I was with a carer that wasn't looking after me. I don't know what that would look like because I barely saw them.*

*It's just those kinds of things are important, the relationship and that ongoing support. And I think the hardest thing is there are so many change overs. Like I've got a young person who's been with the same caseworker, then she went on maternity leave and they've got a new caseworker at the end of last year and now they're about to change them again. And I'm like, why? Why would you keep changing caseworkers? They won't have a rapport with them and they are about to turn 18.*

LQ reflected that limitations in the service system can get in the way of caseworkers spending time with kids.

*I think people come in to working with children and young people because they go, I want to make that change; I want to be there. But soon as they get in the door, they realize very quickly that the system is against you. And the ones that go above and beyond to try and make a conscious effort, they are the ones that do burn out really quickly. They get compassion fatigue and stuff like that. They just burn out so quickly and then walk away because they feel like they're not able to make a change because they're stuck in a system that isn't supporting them to support young people.*

She suggested;

*When it comes to actual case working, I think that they need to create a space where there is a focus on reducing the workload. So they need to ramp up bringing caseworkers in and the funding to have more caseworkers that then have less of a workload because, how can a caseworker build meaningful relationships with such a high case load, let alone considering the intensity of work and support needed.*

#### **Recommendation nine**

Caseworkers need smaller caseloads to be able to build relationships and spend enough time with kids to get to know them. Strategies to address staff turnover needs to be considered and implemented so that children and young people don't have to build relationships with multiple workers.

## **6. Police and Justice**

After having the police involved in her removal from her parents LQ said that she experienced a constant fear towards authority which shifted after being involved with PCYC;

*I ended up doing some stuff with PCYC. They have Youth police officers there and that really shifted my belief systems a bit. That probably was the turning point and like obviously growing up and being quite wise and understanding different things, I knew that they weren't the bad people. It was just breaking that barrier because of them being part of an experience that wasn't positive for me.*

While police involvement in her removal was a smooth process because she was familiar with them, TO found the process of police involvement in an allegation to be unsupportive of the victim and not well-equipped to support children.

*I've had good and bad experiences. When I was little, I really knew them all (the police), so them coming to see us and taking us away, that really wasn't like a new thing for me, like it was kind of normal.*

*But a few years in to care, we had a scene where we had to make a report about something that happened to my sister, and the way they kept questioning it, I didn't appreciate it, because they were trying to use me to see if I knew anything, to justify if it happened or not. And it didn't happen to me, I wasn't there, I personally didn't go through it, I didn't witness it, I wasn't around when it happened. And it felt like they were using me as a way to shut it down and get rid of it and make it a false allegation or not important.*

*I was like 11, and them talking to me about it like that, it made it hard for me because I didn't go through it, but I was supposed to protect her. I was the mother figure my whole life to my little sister and my little brother, so knowing that anything happened to them when I was around, it made me mentally just not OK. I felt like I should have done something. I don't think they really thought about that.*

*I think they should have had someone else with them who I could talk to about how that made me feel if I wanted too. Or have a safe person, because I couldn't even have my mom sitting next to me as I talked about it. It had to just be me in front of the camera so I couldn't have any type of support when they were asking me all of these questions. And I'm like hoping I'll disappear, I don't like new people. So it was quite scary for me. I didn't like it.*

*I don't even know if it's their fault really, they just don't realize the repercussions of what can happen when they talk to kids like that, like I just don't think they know. I don't think they mean to be like that, because it's their job. I just think they haven't really been educated on it, so they don't even know how coming in and talking like that and then just leaving can be really detrimental. If they're going to dig around, and they're going to ask you some hard questions. I think they really need to think about how they do it and how they support you afterwards.*

#### **Recommendation ten**

Services like the police who are responding to serious and challenging issues of abuse and neglect need to make sure that they have the right training, and appropriate funding to employ people with the skills to support kids through this process. TO explained how these services can come in and shake up their lives, memories and emotions in the course of doing their job and then they leave and the child is left to process what happened.