

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

VOICES: THE EDUCATION EXPERIENCE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN OUT- OF-HOME CARE

**Report 15/52
ISBN 0 7313 5180 0
ISSN 1445-808X**

September 2002

Members of the Committee on Children and Young People

Mr David Campbell M.P. (Chair), Member for Keira

The Hon. Peter Primose, M.L.C. (Vice-Chair)

Ms Diane Beamer M.P., Member for Mulgoa

Ms Marie Andrews M.P., Member for Peats

Mr Wayne Smith M.P., Member for South Coast

Mrs Judy Hopwood M.P., Member for Hornsby

Mr John Cull M.P., Member for Tamworth

Jan Burnswoods, M.L.C.

The Hon. Don Harwin, M.L.C.

The Hon. Henry Tsang, M.L.C.

The Hon. Alan Corbett, M.L.C.

Staff of the Committee on Children and Young People

Manager

Mr Ian Faulks

Project Officer

Ms Cheryl Samuels

Committee Officer

Ms Jodie Young

Assistant Committee Officer

Ms Susan Tanzer

Chair's foreword

David Campbell MP, Member for Keira Chair, Committee on Children and Young People

“Research over the past 20 years has consistently shown that children in public care fall behind at school, seldom achieve good qualifications, and are much less likely than their peers to go on to further or higher education. However, a small minority of looked-after children do well academically.” (Martin & Jackson, 2002, p. 121)

In October 2001, the Committee on Children and Young People presented, as part of its Macquarie Street lecture series, a lecture by Professor Sonia Jackson on “The education of children in out-of-home care” (Committee on Children and Young People, 2001). The issues raised in Professor Jackson's lecture—which dealt with the experience of children in care in the United Kingdom—gave rise to a request by the Hon. Faye Lo Po' MP, then Minister for Community Services, for the Committee to inquire into the educational outcomes for children in out-of-home care in New South Wales.

The educational outcomes for children in out-of-home care have also been discussed in the most recent Macquarie Street lecture presented by Professor Peter Pecora, of the University of Washington and Casey Family Programs (Committee on Children and Young People, in preparation).

Education has been identified as the crucial factor for determining positive adult outcomes for children and young persons who have been in out-of-home care. However, children and young people in care often come from an environment of abuse and neglect, where education is of little importance. As a consequence, these children are more likely to enter the care system already suffering from learning, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

There has been a lack of Australian research to identify the major issues and barriers associated with the education of children and young people in care. However, from the submissions received by this inquiry, it appears that once these children enter the care system, the primary focus in Australia has been on meeting their physical and emotional needs. Addressing their educational needs has not been recognised as an important factor in the overall well-being of these children.

The impact of continual movement between schools as a result of multiple care placements and the lack of an integrated care management system means that problems faced by these children and young people at school fail to be addressed and compound as the child grows older. As a result, these children fail to achieve a quality educational outcome, which in turn has long term implications for their adult life.

The terms of reference of this inquiry are to:

- Identify the major issues and barriers related to the education and training of children and young people living in out of home care
- Advise on ways to monitor the education progress and outcomes of children and young people living in out of home care.
- Identify and advise on good practices and effective strategies for enhancing the education performance and outcomes of children and young people in out of home care.

The Committee has received over forty written submissions commenting on these terms of reference, and has now held three days of public hearings to obtain the testimony of representatives of government agencies, non-government organisations, and individuals – particularly people with out-of-home care experiences.

At the Committee's hearing on Friday 20 September 2002, representatives of the CREATE Foundation testified. As part of that testimony, the Committee heard first hand from six people who had out-of-home care experiences. The Committee has also, through the assistance of the Care Leavers Australian Network, received over a dozen written submissions from people who were in out-of-home care.

The Committee believes that its inquiry process will be fostered and extended if the voices of those with out-of-home care experiences was given prominence and a wider distribution through an interim report of the Committee.

Acknowledgements

I thank the participation of representatives of the CREATE Foundation and the Care Leavers Australia Network in the inquiry into the education of children in out-of-home care. My Parliamentary colleagues and I are particularly grateful for the openness and candour of those young people who testified before the Committee, and of those older people who wrote so clearly and forcefully about their out-of-home care experiences during their childhood.

I thank my fellow Members of the Committee on Children and Young People for their work during the inquiry. I value the diversity of experience and views that they bring to the work of the Committee, and I believe the reports of the Committee are so much the better for this variety of perspectives.

Again, I am grateful for the assistance of the secretariat to the Committee on Children and Young People, not only Mr Ian Faulks, the Committee Manager, but to Mrs Cheryl Samuels, Ms Jodie Young and Ms Susan Tanzer, who have very quickly formed a hard-working and very competent team.

I commend this report to Parliament.

Contents

	Pages
Members of the Committee on Children and Young People	2 - 3
Chair's foreword	5 - 6
Voices: The education experience of children and young people in out-of-home care	9 - 48
APPENDIX 1: CREATE Foundation (2002). Australian children and young people in care: Report card on education. September 2002	49 - 95
Extracts of the Minutes of the Committee on Children and Young People	97 - 111

VOICES: THE EDUCATION EXPERIENCE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE

The evidence of CREATE Foundation - Ms A speaks of her education experience - The evidence of CREATE Foundation continues - Ms B speaks of her education experience - Mr E speaks of his education experience - Mrs C speaks of her education experience - Ms D speaks of her education experience - The evidence of CREATE Foundation concludes - Care Leavers of Australia Network submissions - Concluding comments - References

The Committee on Children and Young People believes that an important element to its work is to encourage and listen to the views and opinions of children and young people, that is, to foster the participation of young people in dealing with matters that affect young people.

On Friday 20 September 2002,

Ms Michelle Townsend, Acting National Director, CREATE Foundation,
Ms Sarah Ludowici, Consulting Facilitator, CREATE Foundation, and
Ms Michelle Tovey, Facilitator, CREATE Foundation,

appeared before the Committee to testify on issues associated with the education of children in out-of-home care.

Ms Townsend, Ms Ludowici and Ms Tovey were accompanied by five further witnesses who requested anonymity regarding their testimony. These witnesses are now all adults, but had spent considerable time in care during their childhood. The Committee agreed to their request. The evidence of these witnesses are coded in the transcripts published in this report as Ms A, Ms B, Mrs C, Ms D, and Mr E. In general, their testimony regarding specific schools, places of residence and other terms or description that might lead to the identification of these witnesses has been removed. It is emphasised that the transcript of the evidence of these witnesses has thus been edited substantially.

The evidence of CREATE Foundation

Ms TOWNSEND: ... I will give a broad outline of CREATE Foundation and the work that we do just to set the picture. Then Ms A will speak about her experience. Then I will come back and talk about what we have found over the last nine years about the experience of children and young people in care with the education system and a recent report card survey that we undertook. Then the remaining young people will share their experiences. In conclusion, I will talk about where CREATE would see

the future of education going within New South Wales. I like working informally so I am happy if questions are asked during the presentations or held until the end....

CREATE was established about nine years ago as the organisation for children and young people in care across Australia. We had a different name, the Australian Association of Young People in Care. It has changed in the last three years to CREATE Foundation. We were established to provide a voice for the 21,000 children and young people currently within the care system across Australia. For a long time prior to CREATE being established the experiences of children and young people were not heard. They were not at the table in terms of sharing what was happening to them, what was working well for them and what was not working well.

CREATE has worked and grown quite considerably over the last nine years to work together and to represent this group in different avenues. I have given you some statistics which are our extrapolation of Australian Institute of Health and Welfare statistics. This is what we use to get a bit of a sense about the changes with children and young people in care. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report on 'Child Protection Australia' gets put out every twelve months and then we draw out this for our own use internally. That is where our statistics are based. In New South Wales at the moment, according to this, we have 8,500 children and young people in care—a significant proportion of the 21,000 across the country.

Most children and young people who come into the care system, as you would be aware, come in because of sustained abuse and neglect. Often the abuse or neglect has been happening over a long period prior to their coming into the care and protection system. In the past two or three years there has been a strong shift away from making children and young people long-term wards (which would mean that they are in care until they are 18 years old). There have been a lot more short-term orders, so a lot more children and young people come into the care system, go back to their parents, come back into the care system, then go back with their parents. That reflects the changing nature of the care system within Australia.

At CREATE we are really strong about the fact that once a child comes into the care and protection system and is taken into statutory care the child is the responsibility of the State. The responsibility does not just sit within the Department of Community Services; all government departments involved in any way with children and young people in care need to take responsibility to ensure that their needs are met. They are within the care and protection system without their parents as advocates and they do not have the same sort of people ensuring that they get the services they need always. Most children and young people that come into the care system are quite young—under the age of nine—and, as it says in the handout, come in through no fault of their own. A bit later we will talk about the experience children and young people in care have.

There are a lot of assumptions out there that the children have done something wrong and that is why they have come into care. So we want to make that statement as strongly and publicly as possible. They have come into the care system because of abuse or neglect or because their parents have been incarcerated or killed in a car accident or something like that. It is not through what they have done on their own.

Many children and young people, when they leave the care system and when they are in the care system, have difficulty separating that it is not their fault and they had no responsibility for their situation. Often they carry that feeling: something they did somewhere along the track has caused this to happen to them. CREATE started with organisations across most States of groups of young people that came together wanting to do some work around changing the care and protection system. They would meet and get involved with the different agencies that were working in that field around creating some change. Our biggest thing in the beginning was very much about having a voice and just saying: Some of these things are not working well and we would like you to hear us and to change this.

Since we became CREATE Foundation we have become a lot more focused in terms of the areas that we work in. There are three main things that we have been told again and again. The first is that young people in care feel incredibly isolated in the care experience and there is not a sense of other young people going through the same experience. They can be the only young person in care in a school and it can be very isolating and internalised and not shared with other people. The second thing is that young people often feel that it is very difficult to change their circumstances. There may be five or ten other people—caseworkers, teachers and foster carers—that are making decisions about their lives, quite serious decisions about what school they will attend, what placement they will be in, what sort of contact they will have with their parents, what sort of contact they will have with their siblings. So it can be very disempowering to go through life with a sense of lack of control. The third area—this is partly why we are here today—is that a lot of young people have taken from their care experience a burning desire to change the care system. They want to make it better for future generations that come through the care system and change it to a more positive experience. We talk about those three areas as being connect, empower and change.

The work that we do is very much not in isolation. Our approach is always to work with other stakeholders. CREATE and all the young people that CREATE represents do not have a single answer to change the care system to make it a more positive place. But we believe that working with stakeholders—including the Department of Community Services, foster carers and the non-government service providers—we can come up with some of the answers and start to solve some of the very complex problems that are faced within the care system.

I will just speak quickly about the programs we offer. The first thing we do is **Connect**, and concerns connecting children and young people in care. With 21,000 children across the country, we are never going to be big enough that they can experience all of our programs and come face to face together and meet with us, but we have several initiatives. One of them is the magazine – *CREATE* – that goes out free to 15,000 children and young people in care over the age of five across Australia every two months. It is written by children and young people and it is edited by a young woman. The content comes straight from children and young people's experiences. We get a lot of poetry, a lot of stories, and a lot of creative expression about what their lives have been like and we use it as a promotional tool about what we are doing, when we are next coming to their State and what is happening around where they do. The second thing that is quite widely accessible is our *CREATE FOUNDATION website* which we set up recently at www.create.net.au. We were loath to do so because most

children and young people in care do not have access to the Internet. With a rise in the lack in some States of this case management tool, we have seen Departments and service providers funding foster carers to have a computer at home and Internet access. Over the past six to nine months, we have seen an increase in young people who can access the Internet at home and therefore access our web site. The third thing we do is *Club CREATE*, which is where all children and young people in care, either through the magazine or through the website, can join up to an exclusive club of young people who receive a newsletter six times a year. They receive the magazine one month and they receive the newsletter the next month. They receive personalised birthday cards, prize draws and that sort of thing. It is a personalised way of connecting young people together. Club CREATE has been a big hit. We started off about 15 months ago and we now have 15,000 members already from across the country. Last weekend we had a foster care picnic and another 100 young people in New South Wales signed up. People are very keen about it.

The second area we work in is called **Empower**. We have two significant areas in which we work. The first one is *Mission B*, which is a leadership program for young people who are transitioning out of the care system. We focus on the 14-18 year age group and get them to tap into their dreams, goals and desires that they may have put on the backburner or have not been able to achieve. We get them to tap into that and connect them into their community and to a mentor to actually go after setting a goal for themselves about what they would like to achieve, and then putting all the actions in place to do that. What we have found so far is that it has been a very successful program in terms of young people's enjoyment of it, and about 74% of them have gone back to education or further study as a result of going through that program, which is quite significant. That has retapped them into their dream and, as we all know, education is a crucial part of that. A second area is *Create Bank* and this is new. It was launched at the beginning of the year. It is a pool of funds and young people can apply to get money to do something that is their dream or desire. In the first round within New South Wales we had a lot of applications for musical instruments, dancing lessons, push bikes, we had a Game Boy request, and lots of requests for fishing from young men who had never had the opportunity to go fishing and had no fishing equipment. How we approach it with Create Bank is that we do not give out straight cash. It is very much about examining whether there is an opportunity that we can give. For the young men who wanted to go fishing, there were three of them who all lived around Blacktown, so we tagged them together so that they could connect. We decided not to just give them the fishing equipment but we decided to take them out on a boat on the harbour that we could get through one of our corporate partners which could sponsor that and give them a real experience of fishing as well as give them the equipment. We approached it very much that way—matching opportunities as well as just been able to give out things that these young people who, without Create Bank, would probably never receive them. Unfortunately, we also receive requests for things that should be met by the Department of Community Services. A lot of young people write to us for clothes because as they have grown, their shoes have become too tight or their school uniform is too small, or they only have two pairs of jeans and two tops and they would like some more clothes. Anybody who has teenage children would know how hard it is trying to keep up with the fashion of their peers. They often feel as though they are the poor seconds because they do not have the sort of clothing that matches their peers, so we also get a lot of request for that. We need to work out with

the Department, which we do, what is the Department's responsibility that fits within statutory care and what fits within Create Bank.

The third area is **Change**, which is our real focus on being able to change the care and protection system to make it a more positive place for children and young people in care. We are involved in a range of different initiatives across the country but for the next 12 months and over the past six months our two areas of focus have been on case management, which is how children and young people in care are planned in terms of their experience, why they are in care, and how that is tracked through.

These areas come together when we focus on education, which is why we have been doing report cards and definitely why we are here today. We have a number of initiatives and one is the Young Consultants Program. We have two young people who have gone through our Young Consultants Program which is an intensive training program, and then they are supported in matching two projects that we may be involved in throughout the sector, and they gain experience through that. We also deliver training packages so that all new district officers within the Department of Community Services receive training, and part of that component is CREATE talking about the participation of children and young people within case planning and the care and protection system. We put out the report card twice yearly. The main report card that we put out around Christmas time is about comparing State and Territory care and protection systems and we monitor how they are going in terms of meeting the needs around what we see as the critical areas for children and young people in care, such as safety and wellbeing, placement change and stability. We look at how each State is going, compared to the others, and we also look at how the State has gone from the year before, and what areas they have improved in, and that sort of thing.

Recently, we released a second report card [see Appendix 1: CREATE Foundation (2002). Australian children and young people in care: Report card on education. September 2002]. I was quite involved in this report card. I was part of the team, and in the surveys of young people who were surveyed for that report card. I will read a little about one of the young men that particularly struck me. Jack is 12 years old and he lives in New South Wales and he has been in long-term care since he was about four. He recently was surveyed as part of the report card. Jack 12 has had more than five placements and he has attended five different schools, so over the past six years, every time he changed placements, he attended a different school. The placements would have broken down for a number of reasons and one may have been that he may have been put into short-term foster care and they were not able to take him any longer after that point, or the foster carers that he was placed with were not able to support his needs and were not supported in being able to do that, so it broke down for that reason. There is basically a lack of foster carers available in general. Those foster carers who are caring for children and young people in New South Wales often are very stretched and have a number of children placed with them. Whatever the reasons why it broke down, what we have now is Jack at age 12 who is about to go into high school next year. He has had five different family experiences and he has had five different school experiences and he starts high school next year without any stability of schooling whatsoever and he is years behind the eight ball. He will admit that the things he loves are computers and sport but his reading is not that good. He knows that, and he is going into the high school system next year. I am sure that all of us know that the outcome for Jack, if something is not done in terms of ensuring that there is some

continuity in his life and his family where he is living and some continuity and extra support and assistance around his education, that he will leave school as soon as he can. He will leave school at 14 years and nine months—there is no doubt about it. It is a story we hear again and again.

Mr CAMPBELL (CHAIR): What opportunities are there for Jack to get tutoring? Many families who identify that their child does not have a high reading capacity or ability or is a bit behind in maths, perhaps, might get a tutor. What opportunities are there for someone like Jack to get help from a tutor?

Ms TOWNSEND: Quite limited in lots of ways. Firstly, there is a bit of a breakdown between what the Department of Community Services and the Department of Education and Training believe each department should actually provide in this area. The foster carer does not receive adequate financial compensation to cover the costs of raising the child, let alone the cost of bringing in a tutor. That rules out the foster carer paying for it. The Department of Education and Training has set up a special program, and targets young people with very special high needs. While the Department of Education and Training deals with about 320 each year across the State, that is only a very small proportion of all the children and young people in care.

It has reached the point where if there is a threat of suspension or expulsion, or really strong behavioural problems, they will intervene. However, up to that point the Department of Community Services does not always pay for tutors for young people. It is not the standard. Often there is not a strong educational assessment that has worked out whether that is what is needed or whether that is the best thing for the child, or if something else will work better.

Mr CAMPBELL (CHAIR): Should that be happening? Should there be a closer correlation between educational performance and opportunities to give one-on-one tutoring?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes. One-on-one tutoring is part of it, as is homework help. There is a range of different things that will work for each child and young person. It is all about what will work best for them, and that might not be one-on-one tutoring. They might not feel safe in that environment or may not be able to work well in it. Working with a group of peers may be better. For others a tutor is the perfect answer. Later I will talk about the statistics of young people who receive assistance and the assistance that they like to receive. A lot of young people receive assistance only through a carer sitting down and helping with homework.

I will hand over now to Ms A, who will talk a little about her experience.

Ms A speaks of her education experiences

Ms A: I work casually for the CREATE Foundation as a consultant, and also for the Department of Community Services as a trainer with foster care. I have finished my foster care training with them. Currently I am a student, doing a diploma in health sciences and preparatory studies at the University of New South Wales for law. I was born with the name XYZ. My name was changed for security purposes after an

Apprehended Violence Order was taken out against my stepfather. I was taken into the care of the Department of Community Services at age 12. I have had three major placements, two family group homes and a refuge. At 17 I rented, and supported myself, while completing my Higher School Certificate.

That was my only option because my placement had closed down and I felt uncomfortable living in a refuge. I felt that it was not a secure and supportive environment. While in care I attended six high schools and finally went to TAFE to finish my Higher School Certificate. The reasons for attending so many schools were: moving because of placements; moving for security purposes; emotional disturbances; sometimes I was unable to adjust to a new high school, because I had been to so many and it was difficult; and I was alone and felt isolated; I felt rejected and unsupported in the environment, because there were no facilities for kids in care; and at one stage there was a personal reason.

I wanted to go to a sports high school, because I had asked the Department of Community Services for tutoring and a coach. The Department said no, so I looked at other ways of finding that, which meant I had to go to a school that provided a sports curriculum. It took me 1½ hours to get there, and another 1½ hours to get back; a total of three hours travelling, and that was not what I really needed. So I spent only about a year there. During the first time that I did my Higher School Certificate I found my father through the Electoral Commission. Previously, I had asked my Department of Community Services worker about him, but I was told that she was unable to find him. This caused further emotional disturbances, behavioural anxiety and depression during the course of my education. My child abuse case was put to the court and that dragged on for about three years. That did not impact on me very positively because the perpetrator, my stepfather, was acquitted.

Recently I have learned how child abuse impacts on children's development. Basically it means that they are behind their milestones or developmental stages, because of the trauma that they have experienced. It can take longer to develop skills because the child may not keep up in class, and then a class moves on the child has lost the opportunity. Sometimes there is no-one to teach; I am referring especially to mathematics and reading and writing skills. In order to move on to more advanced levels you have to learn the basics and keep up. It is sometimes difficult to keep up with that process, especially for someone in care.

Whilst in care I dealt with many issues such as family separation, feeling isolated, no sense of belonging, overwhelmed, feeling anxious and depressed, and fear. But there was one positive experience. I went to a behavioural school for disturbed children – Woniora Road High School – a State school funded by the Department Education and Training for disturbed kids who cannot attend mainstream high school. Two weeks ago I went back there to compare my reports and read my files and to have a look at where I was then. I noticed while comparing my reports, which I have brought with me today, that during times of stress or depression my remarks were very low, at other times they were just average.

Woniora Road High School offers a social skills program as well as the normal high school curriculum. I could go there for only one semester, but nowadays children can go for the whole time of high school and get their Higher School Certificate. The

benefit of that school, especially for kids in care, is that it is in a small setting, there is no anxiety about suffering rejection. It has strategies to implement any issues around that. It is a safe and secure environment and they push for kids to at least finish their Year 10 certificate. I believe that this is perfect for kids in care, because it is safe and secure while they are learning their social skills as well as their high school curriculum. It helps them deal with issues of being a young person and also a young person in care. I believe a good education is the key to a better future.

Mr CAMPBELL (CHAIR): Thank you for your comments. It was a brave of you to come and sit before us and go through that.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: How old are you now? How do you describe how you did all the amazing things you did, including studying at university, since you finally got your Higher School Certificate?

Ms A: I am 23 now, that I did not finish my Higher School Certificate until I was 19. I had to repeat it because I did not get enough marks to get into university. I also missed about a year of high school because of being depressed and being fearful and not going outside the house. I missed quite a bit of school, but I kept on going back and picking up bits here and there.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: What is different about you, unfortunately, is that you have come through a system that leaves many kids leaving school early, only barely literate. Did you get extra help?

Ms A: Yes, I did.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Did your father help you?

Ms A: No.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Did the Department of Community Services help you?

Ms A: I was very lucky because I had one placement that lasted four years. That was a very supportive and safe environment. I was very lucky I had that. The other placements did not compare, especially at those times when I was not performing well and possibly not attending school. The four years with that lady were a great help.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Which four years?

Ms A: It was from about 13 to 16. She was very supportive. It was a group home, so there were other kids there as well.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Was that the one closed down?

Ms A: Yes, apparently because of the Usher report. That is what I was told.

Ms BEAMER: Did you want an education?

Ms A: Initially I did not. It was the last thing I thought of. As I got older, this carer reinforced to me how important it was to have an education. Without an education I could not go on to achieve the things I was talking about, that I wanted or may want to do. Eventually, as I got older, I thought, "What I am going to do?" I was stressed about that. I thought I had to do something. I knew I had missed out a lot and I wanted to do something.

Ms BEAMER: In the earlier stages of the placement, was anyone looking at an education case plan for you, or was that peripheral to other problems?

Ms A: Unfortunately, I did not have a case plan. For about two years I did not have a caseworker. We were supposed to, but I did not. I was asking for a lot of things and they were saying no. I was trying to find other ways to access things. I looked around at high schools and different programs. They said yes to one thing. They probably thought I would not take it, because it took an hour and a half to get there and back. That was an option and I thought I would try it. They were not very helpful; I did a lot of the research myself-finding out what was available, how much it cost and so on.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Woniora Road High School was a special school, a sports high school. Presumably some of the six schools you mentioned were local comprehensive high schools. Do you have any views about whether it is best for someone in foster care or whatever form of care to be educated in the local area with other kids who live in the area? You seem to be suggesting that Woniora Road High School was a really good experience.

Ms A: It was a good experience because it provided a good environment. The teachers are trained to handle these sorts of children; that is, those who cannot go to a normal, mainstream high school or integrate. They still need an education and to develop their social skills. It is really important. No mainstream school provides that education, especially if a student has problems, abuse issues and so on.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: You are suggesting that a large number of kids in care have those emotional needs and problems. An ordinary high school may not be suitable.

Ms A: It may not be for some people, because they need more help to heal and to deal with their issues. Doing a normal high school curriculum is difficult.

Ms BEAMER: Would it work better if there were a teacher at each mainstream school assigned to look after those students?

Ms A: Yes, in every school. When I was going to school in an inner Sydney suburb there was a worker for Aboriginals. I felt really left out because there was something for everyone else and I was the only one who did not have anyone to go to, to relate to or to ask questions. Every other group was represented. It made it more difficult because people did not understand. Some kids act out, and I was acting out really badly at that stage. They just thought I was a bad kid. They could not understand that I was just coping and responding to what was happening to me.

Mr CAMPBELL (CHAIR): In evidence last week it was said that it would be best that a school did not know that a young person was in care in the sense that the young person would be seen to be part of the general school community. Do you have a comment?

Ms A: My experience has been that the teachers and counsellors always know. I left school three or four years ago. If they do not know, they cannot help. It would be better for the child if they treated that information privately. I guess they are worried about the child being treated differently. The child needs more support, perhaps an extra work sheet or someone they can go to for help. It is important they know, but the information should be treated confidentially. A few people need to know; for example, the teachers teaching them or the principal. It might be up to the children as well whether they want people to know when they are ready.

Ms ANDREWS: Did you feel at times during your school years that you were discriminated against because you were in foster care?

Ms A: I did because people think there is something is wrong with you. That is a very common view. I always had a cover story. I would say that I was staying at my aunty's house. That was the main story I used. I really felt that.

Ms ANDREWS: Where did you get that feeling?

Ms A: I remember one particular occasion. I was misbehaving in class and the teacher said, "Is this what they teach you in homes like that?" I was really embarrassed; and thought that everyone would now know. That showed me that people held that view. It was a concrete example of how I felt and what happened. I felt that people felt that way about me living in care, and not necessarily me telling them but finding out like that.

Ms ANDREWS: What about your peers? Did you feel you were treated differently?

Ms A: I felt very different from them because they lived at home, they had a family and were in a supportive environment, and I was not. I did not have anyone. Christmases, birthdays and so on were difficult, because I was alone. I am alone because of family separation and that sort of thing.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Did you make friends?

Ms A: I made some friends, but I moved around a lot. At that age, they were not solid relationships. I have kept some friends from high school.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Did everyone know your situation?

Ms A: Not all of them at the time. If I felt I should tell them, I did. Sometimes I did not disclose because I felt it was not necessary. I was very embarrassed and ashamed of it.

Mr CAMPBELL (CHAIR): I do not know how you find time to study.

Ms A: It takes a lot; I am busy.

Mr CAMPBELL (CHAIR): We will now move on. Thank you very much.

The evidence of CREATE Foundation continues

Ms TOWNSEND: I will draw out some of the themes that Ms A has talked about. For us at CREATE, education is critical for children and young people in care. It provides them with opportunities in the future and enables them to avoid the intervention of the care and protection system becoming intergenerational. We see far too much of that. It is the gateway, the passport; it is the most critical thing. Until recently, it has been one of the key areas that have been given very minimal focus in terms of care and protection of young people. This is an issue across Australia; it is not peculiar to New South Wales. It is not New South Wales specific, it is quite general. All States and Territories are getting to the point now of thinking that education really is quite important.

What children and young people in care want, when we have talked to them, can be distilled down to the same essential thing every time: to have long-term stability, a sense of consistency and continuity in their care, education, live normally like their peers, not feel different, not feel ashamed, not feel isolated, have opportunities and information, a sense of connection with other people so that they are not going through this alone and they are not walking through this alone, a family, love and care, belonging, and community. They are not amazing things; they are general things that we would all want for ourselves and our children and young people. But the reality is that for most children and young people in care that is not the experience they have at all. They do not feel a sense of connection or belonging. They are moved around from placement to placement. Their education is changed as a result of that. Often, they are not provided with opportunities to reach their potential, or even the given information about what is happening in their lives around them.

What we see as the reality for many children and young people in care is that the meaning of crucial safety overshadows anything that looks at education. Education is the last thing that is thought about when a child or young person is removed from the home. There is no real connection back to what it means about their schooling and how we manage to do that successfully. As Ms A said, she did not have a case plan. Unfortunately, that is still the case. Despite the Department of Community Services often being aware that the situation is not good for the child or young person, the removal happens without adequate planning, particularly planning around education at that time. Children can be moved to the nearest available carer, which can mean five suburbs away. How that relates back to school is not emphasised significantly enough, from what I have learned when talking to children and young people and the Department of Community Services.

I understand that the Department of Community Service's responsibility is one of statutory care and protection. It must ensure that children and young people are safe, which is right and, obviously, the highest priority. But, at the same time, education can be one sense of continuity for the child when everything else has been taken away. All belongings they take with them have been packed up into those blue-and-red plastic

bags and off they go with them be placed in another family that they do not know, that they have never met before. Often, they have to change schools to boot. They get sent to a new school without the school uniform and they have all these emotions about what is happening with their lives and carrying that in with them. That is a key area in which I would like to see some really strong change. At the front end, when children and young people are coming into the care system, we should ensure that education has the focus and that, wherever possible, the child remains in the school and the community that the child has been within.

Ms BEAMER: We have heard evidence that the biggest priority is emotional and physical danger. Would you put education up there so that three core things should be looked at? We have heard evidence that when a child is removed it could be up to six weeks before the school placement is negotiated. Should the three core questions at the very beginning be physical health, emotional health and education?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes. For me there are two parts to that: it is education and a sense of community. Education, which is the key to continuing to learn and grow. Often they are moved from siblings and not placed with siblings. Are they going to have contact with their aunties, uncles and grandparents? There is another factor that needs to be thought about straight up. Let us not isolate these children and young people. Whatever sense of connection to their old lives we can keep, let us make sure it is there. The second thing that is a reality for children and young people in care is that children who come into the care system are often educationally behind their peers to start with, for a lot of different factors that you can imagine. When they are living in the situation where abuse and neglect is quite high, the focus on reading at home, homework and all those sorts of things can be very low.

If we did an educational analysis of all children and young people coming into care, we would find at that point that many were behind their peers on any of the benchmark testing we would do. Although we recognise that, our strongest push is that for departments that have responsibility for these children we need to do whatever needs to be put in place to ensure that they can reach their potential. If they are behind the eight ball, let us put in the resources to bring them up to be the best they can be. That may never be achieving in the top 10%, but it is about giving them support so that they get a bit of a chance because they have not had it up until the time they come into care. Later I will talk about a push for an educational assessment to be done by someone who is qualified to do it, not just a bit of a chat with a teacher about how they are going, but an educational assessment that looks at the whole educational needs within the first three months of their coming into the care system so that we can work out what we need to put into place to match their needs.

As Ms A mentioned, and I am sure the other young people here today would also say, the planning support and resourcing of educational needs is very haphazard. Some children in New South Wales are under the LAC system—the Looking After Children case management system. An educational plan is a crucial part of that. All of those children have an educational plan. But for most children it does not exist, and not a whole lot of thought is put into it. As Ms A mentioned, when some resources are needed often it is hard to get the assistance they may need. Planning for the educational needs of these children is not done in any thorough way at all. Some caseworkers will have a priority on that, and some of the non-government organisations that support

these children have a priority on that, but it is not the standard, it is not the norm and it is definitely not happening for all children and young people across New South Wales.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Why is that? We have heard evidence that caseworkers in the Department of Community Services have too big a workload. Is it that they would if they had time, but they do not have the time? Is it because some of them do not think that education is all that important? Is it that they do not bother with older children who are near school-leaving age?

Ms TOWNSEND: As I said earlier, education is very overshadowed by the immediate needs around safety and wellbeing. For caseworkers who work with children and young people in out-of-home care, they are driven by crisis. A placement that is breaking down, that is what they need to work on. I have worked with a lot of caseworkers, fantastic workers who believe in education and understand the importance of it, but at the end of the day they are pressed to deal with their crisis cases in their case load. They do not have the time to do the focus, the planning and the checking in. We talk to young people all the time who have not seen their caseworker for months and months on end. There is no regular contact. If a child is out there in care, is quiet and everything seems to be going well then they are pretty much left on their own because that is good and they do not have a crisis. Once they have a crisis attention is placed on it. This says something about resourcing, about people having the time to do that. But there also needs to be some sort of mandatory policy to ensure that this happens. There needs to be some sort of mandatory policy to ensure that for all children and young people in care education is focused on and that it is recognised as a critical thing. The education system—teachers, and even caseworkers, unfortunately—make assumptions about children and young people in care that limits the outcomes these young people could achieve. Ms A talked a little bit about that. Some of the assumptions we have heard that they make about kids in care is that they are too much work, they have limited academic potential, they have to prove themselves before we will put the effort in, they are just passing through the school and therefore we do not have to put in much effort, they are not one of us, they will more easily fail than succeed, they are bad or they are beyond help, or they must have done something terrible to be in care.

What we find is that our kids are facing a huge amount of preconceived assumptions, often negative, about why they are in care and what they are capable of achieving. It comes very much from a negative focus, as opposed to building on the strength that the child may have and that sort of thing. We hear that again and again. Ms A's comment about a teacher bringing this up in a conversation in front of the class I have heard probably thirty times. I think that is probably the tip of the iceberg. I have very strong views on education, about kids going into the education system with no-one in the school knowing that they are in care. One of the key things that I struggle with is the question: How do we maintain confidentiality? In reality, that just does not happen. Our children will not go and see the school counsellor because they know, as has been proved, the school counsellor will talk to other teachers, and then everybody knows their story and what is happening to them.

Mr CAMPBELL (CHAIR): I think that is true with most kids, from what I hear when I talk to school counsellors and kids. They do not want to go and talk to the counsellor because the whole school community will know about it.

Ms TOWNSEND: ... We undertook a survey for our recent report card in which we surveyed 161 children and young people in care across Australia. Our staff at each of the CREATE centres got on the phone and talked to young people aged between 12 and 18 years. Out of that, 61% were female and 39% were male, which does not reflect the care and protection community, which is currently about 52% male and 48% female. We had a mix of ages in the respondents, but more strongly in the 16 to 18 year-old age group. Out of 161, 44% were from New South Wales and 21% were indigenous – which pretty much represents the average across Australia – and 7% had English as a second language. One of the things that potentially skews the results a bit is that, because CREATE mostly has access to children and young people in care, they find out about us after they have been in care for a while. You will see from our report card that 68% of the children and young people we talked to have been in care for three or more years. So we are not so much talking to the young people who have come into care within the last few months, because it takes a little while for them to find out about CREATE. As you can imagine, it is a busy enough time in their lives, and all their information about the care and protection system comes from case workers and case workers sitting down and talking to them and telling them that there is an organisation out there for them called CREATE and what they offer is kind of at the end of the priorities.

Of the children we spoke to, you will see that there are a few who had only one placement or two placements, which is always a very positive indication. It is showing that there is some continuity and stability. But at the other end you get the large group who have had 6 to 10 placements, and an equally large group who have had more than 10 placements. Two of the young women who will speak today have had an extreme number of placements, which I would call a total failure of the system to meet their needs. Of that group, most were attending school now. Some were in primary, and most were at secondary school. Of the ones at school, 77% were attending a school in the public school system, and the other 23% were attending alternative education—a private school or that sort of thing. Within the public school system we included TAFE, because a lot of our young people aged 15, 16 and 17 are at TAFE for at least one or two days a week, rather than just attending their local high school.

What is of great concern is that 42% of the people that we surveyed said that they had attended four or more primary schools. That, for me, is where I would like to see some focus. We cannot have our children who are in those critical ages around literacy and numeracy changing from school to school and missing out on bits of their education. It alarms me that a large number are saying that they have attended lots of different primary schools – 22% had attended five or more primary schools.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Is that the number of schools they have attended since they came into care, or since they were five?

Ms TOWNSEND: Since they came into the care system.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: So they might actually have attended a number before they came into care?

PROFILE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE 2002

GRAPH NOT AVAILABLE IN PDF VERSION

Ms TOWNSEND: Absolutely, with their families and the dynamics in their families. Within the high school, we saw a lot more who were at the same high school, which is good to see. But there are still a reasonable number of the group that have been to two high schools or three high schools, and some five high schools. I have talked a little about educational plans. This is one of the key things, because with planning comes progress and action. We went out and asked all the young people do they have education plans that they have been a part of, or, in some cases, that they have not been a part of but are aware of, because sometimes plans are set without any participation of the child or young person. We found that 57% did not have an education plan, and 19% were unsure, so it is likely that they either did not participate in it or it does not exist. Only 24% had an educational plan. Off the top of my head, I could say that 20% of those were kids managed under Looking After Children case management, because Looking After Children case management is in a couple of other States as well as in one of the major non-Government organisations here in New South Wales. They were the only ones, and that is because it is a process they go through that is quite clear in terms of participation in the plan.

Mr CAMPBELL (CHAIR): Barnardos last week gave the Committee information about Looking After Children case management.

Ms TOWNSEND: Do young people in care receive extra assistance with school? That is, is any teacher or anybody else helping them out, like a special education officer giving them some sort of assistance? We had over 100 who said no, a few who did not know, and only 27 said they were actually receiving additional assistance within the school system.

Do young people in care receive additional assistance with school work at home? There is an increase in answers for that, but most were about foster carers who were giving them support to do their homework each afternoon, as opposed to tutors or any other sort of homework help centres. Of those that we asked and said they were receiving assistance, we asked: "Is it meeting your needs?" For the vast majority, it was. Some said they need a lot more assistance, that they were really struggling in different areas. A few did not know whether they needed extra assistance or not.

We asked the group that did not receive any extra assistance whether or not they needed some. Twenty-nine said that they did, and 98 said that they did not. So there is a group out there who are not receiving any assistance now and are saying that they do need it. I think we really need to tap into that. That does not include the 98 who said they did not need any assistance and were progressing really well through the education system, because obviously through this we do not track that. But I suggest that some of those 98 could do with some extra support.

Ms LUDOWICI: I was part of the research team. When we asked the young people, "Do you need any extra assistance?" there was this automatic, "No, I'm right, I'm fine." There was this reaction of "I'm okay, and I fit in," as opposed to, "I am different, and I have needs." So the way they responded was quite defensive.

Ms TOWNSEND: I will now hand over to Ms B, who will share some of her experience....

Ms B speaks of her education experience

Ms B: ... A child's life should consist of stability, security, understanding and affection. Unfortunately, not every child receives these. I entered the care system at the age of 12. Though I received lots of affection, my parents lacked the knowledge of how to provide the stability, the security and the understanding that was needed. Many people form opinions about young people in care, and in doing so presume the young person is at fault. My experiences also show that these biases exist in the education system as well.

Though my home life had been altered, I was fortunate enough to remain at the same school. It seemed to be the only part of my life that was stable—until the school found out that I had entered the care system. The staff at the school had formed an opinion, presuming it was my own fault, and allowing that opinion to be known was very traumatic. My self-esteem dropped dramatically. I was threatened, ignored and scorned at home. I reacted with anger and frustration. The reasons for my actions always went unseen, and I was constantly being disciplined.

Not only was I struggling with staff, but I was constantly battling with peers. Never once was I sat down and spoken to, never once did anyone question my behaviour. My marks dropped dramatically due to this and to the lack of support I had in my placement. Things became extremely hard to handle and I left school, not even completing Year 8. After leaving school my placements broke down and finding a bed for a night forced me to travel for hours every day. In 1997 I was placed in Menali, which is an institution for troubled children. During this placement I attended an education program for gifted children at Linwood Hall where for the first time my issues were addressed. I was in a small group of children with one-on-one tuition, and I found this quite beneficial.

When my placement at Menali had finished, I returned to foster care in a small coastal village. My education was the main concern for my carers and they organised for me to attend the local primary school where I was assigned a teacher and classroom to assist me with my correspondence studies. Yet again I benefited from the one-on-one assistance. Unfortunately, my placement in the small coastal village was only temporary and I continued to return to the way things had usually been—somewhere new every night and not in the same area. After months of this I eventually found my feet and stayed with some close friends in a large regional city in New South Wales, where I tried constantly returning to school and continuously being refused due to my previous school reports.

At 15 years I gave birth to my son. It was a dramatic change for someone so young. But after having my son I was more determined than ever to make a life for myself and my son. I tried at numerous times to resume school, yet I was being denied again. The reason this time was because I was a mother. I was told that teachers would not know how to approach me. I approached my local TAFE campus where I was refused because of my age. I waited twelve months and enrolled myself into the TAFE College

but my term was cut short due to the child-care centre not having a placement for my son. Since then I have found alternative child care and am currently trying to complete my School Certificate through correspondence studies.

I am very proud of my determination and strength. It has pulled me through probably the toughest part of my life. My concern is for the generations to come and the young children in the system today who have grown up with the ways of the system and no other way. I hope the system will learn that we are not just statistics, we all have individual needs that need to be assessed individually.

MR CAMPBELL (CHAIR): Thank you, Ms B, that was a very good submission.

Ms BEAMER: Ms B, when you were unable to attend the schools, were you refused by a head teacher or a principal?

Ms B: Yes, it was basically the principals.

Ms BEAMER: Was there anyone from the Department of Community Services prepared to broker for you with the Department of Education and Training?

Ms B: Basically what was happening, any school that I tried to enter would ring my previous school. The principal there had a personal vendetta against me. He gave any other school the impression that I was expelled from the school. After being denied basically every school in the region, I rang the Department of Education and Training and said, "Is there any record of me being expelled because I was unaware of it?" They went through everything and said, no, as far as they were concerned I should be at school, there should not be a reason why I was not. A lady from the Department of Education and Training actually sat down with me and we went through all the schools and that sort of stuff. But then the schools started coming up with the excuse that I was not in their local area, that sort of thing. After a while it got too much.

Ms BEAMER: Did the Department of Community Services ever help with this at all?

Ms B: My experience with the Department of Community Services was that the case worker that was appointed to me when I was first made a ward decided she would go on long term leave. Every district officer I had was a temporary district officer. I would go months with one, several times for a long period of time. Just before my wardship ended, I went a year and a half without a case worker. So trying to get into the after care system and all that, to try to do anything without a case worker is extremely difficult—especially for the simple fact I have a secure file. Not every district officer can sit down and do everything. As you were saying before, I do not think their main priority is education. As long as they can find a bed for a night, that sort of thing, that is all they do.

Ms TOWNSEND: Ms B only finished her wardship quite recently. So we are talking about couple of months ago. Her experience of not having a case worker is not years ago, it is very recent.

Ms B: The district officer that I should have had over the last year and a half still has not returned. She has been gone for two years now.

Ms BEAMER: When your wardship ends at 18, does the Department of Community Services say "That is it"?

Ms B: No, the Department of Community Services offers after-care services. I am currently with an aftercare agency which is run through a major non-Government organisation. Before my wardship ended I did sit down with a permanent duty officer and we did go through my case plan until I am 25 years old. I can receive after care assistance until I am 25 years old. Basically, the main thing I suggested was university, the School Certificate and financial assistance to get me through them. My university assistance was denied. My Higher School Certificate was approved but to a point they would provide textbooks but not tuition. Being a single mother the tuition was basically what I was after. Even stressing that though, they still did not seem concerned.

Ms ANDREWS: Have you obtained your Higher School Certificate?

Ms B: No, I have been trying to complete my School Certificate for the last three years.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: At TAFE?

Ms B: I started off at TAFE, but, as I said, with child care for my son and that sort of thing it was extremely difficult. After I found child care I did go back to TAFE. I had a bit of run-in with one of the teachers. I was still seeing the TAFE counsellor and all that sort of thing and I skipped a class to go see her. She found out and I had to explain to her why. Ever since then she told me she was going to fail me. I asked her why and she said, "Because I don't like you, plain and simple." As far as I am concerned, teachers are people you are supposed to look up to. They are like your parents: they guide you through one of the most important times of your life. If you cannot trust your parents or your teachers, if they are not doing their job, what is going to happen to you?

Ms ANDREWS: Ms B, when you needed child care did anyone in authority try to assist you or go out of their way to help you?

Ms B: No-one in the Department of Community Services. One of the organisations that I was living with offered me aftercare support. I had a very strong emotional attachment with the staff there. Basically they were the ones who made me see my ways and got me into independent living and all that, started me rebuilding my life. They still continue to do the follow-up calls. My youth worker there was basically the only one I had to advocate for me.

Ms ANDREWS: Before you were taken into foster care, when you were living at home with your parents, were you good at school?

Ms B: Yes, I had the straight As.

Ms ANDREWS: Straight As?

Ms B: Yes. I was put into programs for gifted children, but back then I sort of focused more on my sport.

Ms ANDREWS: If you do not mind my asking, when you were taken out of care, were you then given the opportunity to contact your parents? You said that you seek a lot of affection from your parents. Were you given the opportunity to phone them and let them know that you were safe and well?

Ms B: My parents divorced when I was about 8. My dad moved away and I did not see him. Then after a while I went back and forth between my parents. If I was with one parent I did not see the other. Just before I went into care I was living with my mother. The reason I went into care was because of my stepfather. The relationship with my mother was fairly stable. Over the years it has sort of ceased. But I think when I first went into care there was a care order, an Apprehended Violence Order taken out on my behalf against my father without my knowledge.

When I was living in the refuges and, basically, when I first went into foster care, I was not allowed to tell my parents where I was, even though it was stated in my files that my parents were not the problem. I am not sure. It seems to me that a lot of other people that I have spoken to have gone through it too. It seems to me that, once they go into the system, certain things are cut from their lives. Depending on the age of a person and depending on that person's strength, they are not sure whether to go after it or not. Basically, you take what you are given. I do not know how many times I have said that the system is ridiculous. But to change the system and to fight the Government on your own, what child is going to think about that?

Ms ANDREWS: How do you feel the system should be changed? Can you tell us that?

Ms B: One of the main problems that I have is that we are counted as statistics. Figures are thrown left, right and centre. We are not statistics; we are people. It is our lives that people are making decisions about. We are not being asked. We are not even being told what is happening. It is just, "You go here, and you go there." People should take more time to sit down and not just talk to the young person but also talk to their networks, like their family, to find out how it is they are reacting. Not every young child will actually tell you; they are going to be very defensive. But before making a decision it should be discussed with them. So, basically, instead of saying, "This is your situation, you fall into this category, so this is what we are going to do with you", they should say, "This is your situation. You do not fall into any category because there are no categories. We will take the appropriate steps to do what suits you best."

Ms BEAMER: Committee members listened to a guest lecturer who talked about the great number of people who enter care and who then seek their parents after care. No matter how bad or how traumatic their situation had been, they sought to reunite themselves with their parents. It seems to me that the point you are making is that you could have got on very well with your mother, given a fostering of that relationship, whether or not you were in her care, but that was denied almost immediately.

Ms B: I think I would have got on with her better without being in her care.

Ms BEAMER: That is what I meant. You would have got on with her better without being in her care, with meetings being arranged and with you remaining as part of that community.

Ms B: Having those sorts of arrangements would be good, as long as they are not intimidating. As long as you do not have a district officer behind you watching you and as long as you do not have a psychologist, a member of the court, or whatever. It must just be your family. If you are allowed to see them because they have been named safe, you should not have the extra outside issues coming into it, if that makes sense.

Mr CAMPBELL (CHAIR): How did you find CREATE?

Ms B: Going back a few years, I was very angry with the system. I had continuous problems with the Department of Community Services. I went to the Community Services Commission. I had several meetings with Robert Fitzgerald, the Commissioner. I sat down with him several times and tried to start an organisation that everybody could be involved in. I tried to get onto refuges committees and that sort of thing. The committees of refuges – not even the youth workers that work there are allowed to get on them. So nobody who interacts with these young children is on these committees.

So I spoke with Robert Fitzgerald about trying to organise something where there were youth workers, members of the public, foster carers, young people and that sort of thing. Obviously, that did not get under way. After that all went down I just kept searching. I figured that there would have to be something out there. My youth worker was doing the same thing. She spent a lot of her time searching and she found CREATE and pushed me straight there. I have been with CREATE for about 18 months.

Mr CAMPBELL (CHAIR): It sounds as though you have been fairly tenacious and that you have tried to stand up for yourself.

Ms B: Very much so.

Ms TOWNSEND: Mr E will now speak to the Committee.

Mr E speaks of his education experience

Mr E: ... I cannot remember much of the younger years of my life because I was jumping from house to house so quickly. Even when I was living at home I was still moving around a bit with my parents, so it was pretty broken up. When I was in Year 3 I came across a foster family. Actually, it was one of my schoolteachers at the time. I went with them and that turned out to be a permanent home for eight years. I was there for eight years. Over the eight years the Department of Community Services would come out a lot to visit and find out how it was going in the household. But they never really bothered about school. That was mainly my foster parents' job. They worried about that and organised that.

I did not get any direction at all during this course. School was very hard. I changed schools about three times in high school. I went from one high school to my dad's house, back home again, and then back to the high school. It was not a very straight and narrow course for me; it was long and windy. It was very hard. As I said, I cannot really say much about my younger life. I cannot remember much of it. I went to about four different primary schools. I went backwards and forwards between two suburbs in western Sydney. I did not get much education there either. There was a time when I went to Minali. I was going to school there but all I did was just sit on a computer and play Pacman. So I was not learning much at all at the time.

The Department of Community Services could be very helpful if they came out and talked to you about what career you were after, whether you needed help in school, with study, or anything like that. We just need help with direction in our lives. I did not have any at all. I am still struggling today and I am twenty years old. I still do not have a straight path. I have no future yet. I am still fighting but, hopefully, I will get on track.

Mr CAMPBELL (CHAIR): What level of education did you complete? Did you finish your School Certificate or your Higher School Certificate?

Mr E: I was doing Year 10. I did quite badly. I was pulled aside. They did a thing at school where if you finished third term you started Year 11 early. At the end of the third term they had a group of people who had not passed yet, and they were given the opportunity to finish their Year 10 certificate and go on to Year 11. I did not want to get behind in Year 11, so I went on to Year 11. But when I left my foster home and went to my dad's house, I changed from one high school to another high school. The level of schooling that they were up to at the second high school was so much higher than it was in the first. They were so far in front, and it really put me behind badly. So I did not end up getting the Higher School Certificate or even coming close. I passed Year 11 the second time I tried but then I pretty much dropped out after that and my life started falling apart again. I have pretty much been trying to get it back on track ever since.

Ms BEAMER: Are you pursuing some education at the moment?

Mr E: I have mainly been pursuing work, but I have also been thinking about education. As I said, I do not have an idea of where I should go with that education, whether I want to get into building or office work. I have no idea set.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Are you working at the moment?

Mr E: I was working but my house fell through and I am homeless again now at 20, so I lost that job last week.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Where are you staying at the moment?

Mr E: At the moment I am staying at my girlfriend's house and that is not permanent either.

Ms BEAMER: Were you made a ward?

Mr E: Yes, I was made a ward—I can't remember when—by my mother until I was 18. I can remember being in court but that is about it. Another thing was that the Department of Community Services also pushed for an adoption for me because I was with a foster family for so long. I was thinking about it. I might have actually done it, but they did not push until I was about 16 or 17 years old and I just thought it was too much hassle changing all my identity, all my details and everything when I would be 18 and I would not be in care anymore anyway, so I did not end up doing it.

Ms BEAMER: Do you think it would have been a good idea?

Mr E: At an earlier stage, it was, because that foster home I was at was the best home that I was ever at. I was happy there. I am still allowed there now and I am not even in foster care. They are still fostering kids today. They have a young kid there who is about nine years old.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: You got back with your dad. Was that only a short-term thing?

Mr E: Yes, I was with my dad for about a year. We started off all right but he was having a fair bit of trouble with my younger brother, and when I was there we were just too much for him to handle.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Had your younger brother always been with your dad?

Mr E: My younger brother has always been with family but he was with his mum for most of his life. Then she went overseas so he had to move to my dad's.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: In these changes you are telling us about, did the Department of Community Services or the Department of Education and Training try to put together a plan that included education or did it get a bit left out because they were busy concentrating on other things?

Mr E: With education, the main help I got was from one of my foster-parents, who was a schoolteacher who taught at a primary school and if I can needed books or anything he used to get them. They were very helpful but I had no course. Like, I find nearly everything interesting but it is whether I want to stay doing that. I get bored very quickly, sort of thing. I went well at school. I was in 3-Unit maths, chemistry, physics, I was doing all the hard subjects and going all right but I never stuck with it for very long because I thought, “This is not what I want to do. Maybe I want to do something else” and I would change my mind, which I think mainly happened because when I was jumping around at a young age, in one house you might get a father figure who likes fishing and another house they might be more into motor sport. You are always trying. If he is a fisher, you are a little fisher, kind of thing. But with all these ideas coming in, such as, “You could be a vet, you could be a doctor, you could be this, you could be that”, I had so many choices but what do I pick. And that is it. Everyone tells you, “It's your decision”, but we do not have any help deciding and that is the problem.

Ms BEAMER: How did you find CREATE?

Mr E: Through my sister, Mrs C. She rang me up one day and told me about it. I was quite interested, so I will get on and see what they can do for me and see how they can help. Maybe give me a course, hopefully.

Mr CAMPBELL (CHAIR): Thanks very much for that and good luck, Mr E. We will move on now.

Ms TOWNSEND: Mrs C is now going to speak.

Mrs C speaks of her education experience

Mrs C: Mr E is my brother. I am the eldest and I am 23 years old. One thing I would like to say is that when I was younger and Mr E was going through his problems and was being taken out of the family home and put in foster care with his schoolteacher, I was in the same school at the time and I saw the kind of things that he was going through. He was acting out quite viciously, tearing his school books up and throwing them all over the place. His foster carer, the teacher, was the only teacher there who was prepared to actually do anything about it. The other teachers were saying, "Leave him. He's just playing up. Give him detention or whatever". They did not actually try and help him with the problem or find out what was going on. I was disappointed in that.

When I got taken out of my family home and put into care, I was put in care at about eight years old. I was put in a group home interstate. From there I was sent back to Sydney to live with my maternal grandmother and I was only there for maybe 12 to 18 months and she sent me back to my mother, who had moved back to Sydney. Then when that broke down again I went into a foster home. When that broke down I went to my paternal grandparents, who could not keep me, so I was put in the care of friends of the family. They became my foster carers but I suffered a lot of abuse there over the two years I was there, so I was sent back down to Sydney, to my mother again.

During all this time I cannot remember how many schools I have attended. I know I have only attended two high schools but as far as primary school is concerned, I do not know how many schools I have attended. There have been that many. I dropped out of high school the first semester of Year 11 because I fell pregnant and had a child at 16. I now have two children and I am married. Being in foster care and moving around from place to place to place constantly, I found it very hard to make friends. I did not want to make friends because I knew that, "Well, in a couple of weeks time I am not going to be here anymore. I am not going to see these friends anymore". To this day I have not carried over any friends that I had in high school. All my friends that I had in high school I do not see anymore; I am not friends with them anymore.

I found that the Department of Community Services was not really prepared to help with my education at all. They were not interested. They focused on, "Okay, let's get this child safe" and, yes, that is a priority but I would have liked to have gone on and done my Higher School Certificate and things like that. I had hopes and dreams. I wanted to become a nurse and things like that when I was younger and that will never happen. I doubt it. I have gone into another area now, but it would have been nice to

actually have someone there to help me with a plan like, “What are your goals? How can we achieve these things for you? Do you need help with tutoring?” and things like that. But I never had anything like that so my school years were very troubled. I used to get into a lot of trouble at school. I was acting out a lot because of the things that were happening to me. It was very distressful.

Ms BEAMER: Given that you moved so much in primary school—you cannot even attest to the number you went to—you did go to two high schools. When you started off at high school were you behind the eight ball? Did you recognise that yourself?

Mrs C: No, not really. I was not really behind. I was just bordering on average, I would say, but I found that once I changed schools, the schooling levels were different and I would have to try and catch up to everybody else. I would be learning one way at one school and then I would swap schools and they were onto something totally different and it would take me a couple of months to catch up to them. I was getting a wide variety of different teaching methods for the different schools.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: You said that the Department of Community Services did not seem to take much interest in your education. Do you think that was partly because you were spending quite a bit of time with your grandparents or other family members? Do you think the Department of Community Services thought that you did not need as much from the Department because you were being cared for by family?

Mrs C: To be brutally honest, I do not think the Department of Community Services cared that much. My district officer was also Mr E’s district officer. She used to come out to our home—this was shortly before I was taken and Mr E was taken—and she would see what was going on in the home. We were being physically abused by our stepfather, and she saw what was going on but did nothing; she did not act on it.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: So someone else made sure you were taken away?

Mrs C: She eventually did it, but it took her quite a while. Even though she knew what was going on, it took her a while to actually do something about it. It came to the point where Mr E was really acting out badly that somebody said, “Okay, something needs to be done; something is wrong”—and that was his schoolteacher. At the time, we had a district officer. It should have been her responsibility to do something. Because of that, Mr E’s schooling suffered, he is unemployed, and he does not know what he is doing with his life. Not that that is a bad thing; I love him anyway.

I guess I was not taught in high school—I do not think I would have passed the Higher School Certificate, put it that way; I do not think I had any hope of passing that. But the support system just was not there. Even if I was screaming out for it, it just was not there.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Did you find anyone in the education department or in the school? Leaving aside the Department of Community Services, which was not helping, was anyone in the education system helping?

Mrs C: I had one teacher in high school who was a very good teacher, and he helped me out a lot with extra homework, worksheets and things like that. But I was only in that high school for two years. I was at a very, very good school on the Central Coast, and then I came back down to Sydney and went to another high school. Once I left and came back down to Sydney, the high school was way behind the high school that I was at. What I was being taught at one school was really, really good and I understood everything, but then when I started at the high school in Sydney—to this day I cannot write an essay.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Do you think the teacher who helped you did so just because that was the kind of person he was, or did he have a particular responsibility for you?

Mrs C: I think he recognised that I had a problem. He could see that I had a problem and needed extra help.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: So that was his decision; it was not the system—?

Mrs C: Yes, it was his decision. I think he was just recognising the problem on his own and decided to help me out because I needed the extra help.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: That was at the high school on the Central Coast?

Mrs C: Yes.

Ms BEAMER: Did you keep in contact with each other very much during that time?

Mrs C: During the time we were in care, no. I did not see Mr E at all.

Mr E: When I was in care at the last place I was at for a couple of years, when my mother moved back to the Sydney area my foster parents pushed me into having contact with my family. So I was visiting the family often, on Mother's Day and things like that, which I think was good because I still had that connection. But the Department of Community Services did not push for it at all; it was my foster parents who pushed for it.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: How did you get to know each other again?

Mrs C: I took it upon myself to do it, I guess. I am the eldest. At the moment our younger brother is in my care. He is 18 years old, and he has a mental disability. Mr E has had problems when he moved back home with our father, so he comes to me. He has lived with me quite a few times now. Our parents have never really been there to support us, so we have had to support each other when we can. So that is pretty much what we do. We stick together.

Ms ANDREWS: It is pleasing to hear your good comments about the high school in the Central Coast, because I am an Member of Parliament from the Central Coast. Why did you have to leave the Central Coast and come back to the city?

Mrs C: I was in foster care. I was placed with friends of the family, really old friends of my grandparents, and I suffered sexual abuse for two years. I went through the court system, and unfortunately the perpetrator was found not guilty; he was acquitted. Once I had told my school counsellor, I was removed straightaway and put straight into foster care. About a month or two later I moved back down to my mother's.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Would you have preferred to move to another house and stay at the high school on the Central Coast?

Mrs C: Yes, I would have.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Were you able to tell the Department of Community Services that?

Mrs C: I did, but it carried no weight at all.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Do you think that perhaps no other foster families were available? Was it explained to you why—?

Mrs C: No. They just said no. They told me, “Your mother is prepared to have you. That's it. Goodbye”. If your parents are going to take you, they would rather do that than put you in foster care. There are other children out there who have probably been in a worse situation than I, and needed a foster carer more than I did. If your family is prepared to take you, they would rather place you there; it is as simple as that.

....

MR CAMPBELL (CHAIR): Certainly. Mrs C, we will treat your evidence as private as well. Again, thank you for being so frank and open with us. I know it is difficult for all of you, but your evidence will help us try to understand some of the issues concerning education, placement, and that sort of thing.

The evidence of CREATE Foundation continues

Ms TOWNSEND: Why it was important for each of the young people to come here and share their experiences is that it is the reality of what it is like. I can sit here and talk to you about the statistics and everything else, but this is the reality. It is what drives me to get up every day, in terms of changing the system. It is why CREATE exists.

We have a group here that has risen up against great adversity and often have been the only advocate for themselves. They have been strong advocates who have been able to manage and navigate their way through the system. There are hundreds of thousands of other kids out there, who I know now, who left school when they were 14, who may be within the adult gaol system or may be homeless, long-term unemployed, who might never get the chance to share their experiences with you.

Ms Tovey is about to start with us at CREATE and has amazing experience from working in the sector, as well as care experience. I would like to give Ms Tovey the opportunity to share with you her experiences with regard to education.

Ms TOVEY: I am currently employed in the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. I work as a program manager for the Emergency Relief Program. I am moving back to working in the community sector with CREATE, which is very exciting for me.

I have worked in the sector for around thirteen years now. I left home when I was 13, and I lived in approximately fifty different accommodation services in New South Wales. I left school when I was 14 because I moved around so much that the accommodation services I was living in were not able to enrol me in schools.

I probably attended about thirty different schools—twenty primary and ten high schools— and I left school in Year 8. Because I moved around the welfare system I became quite familiar with how it worked and I became a youth representative for one of the youth peaks in New South Wales from about age 16. I guess I began my career in the welfare system from there.

I have worked in a number of different areas, particularly involving young people. I have worked with homeless young people, kids in the care system, drug and alcohol abuse, in sexual assault counselling and in government policy. I am now moving back into it, which is quite exciting. Because I have been in a government program for quite a long time I have had time to consider other areas. Looking back at my own experience and hearing about the experiences of other young people, I would say that education is one of the most important things. I feel like I have missed out and lost the opportunity for education. The same thing applies to young people who are in the care system and to everyone else in society. Education is taken seriously in terms of careers. People are employed based on the experience, knowledge and skills they have gained from education. That point is not well considered. Society puts a lot of emphasis on children who are sick because there is the potential for them to get better. But not a lot of time and effort is put into kids who have left home or who have been removed from home. It is like they are damaged goods and they fit into an isolated section of society.

In terms of the issues discussed this morning and the questions you have raised about tutoring, if you are looking at the priorities of children and young people in the care system, education is not particularly high on their personal agendas. Survival is often more important. Education becomes more relevant as time moves on and priorities change.

I think a range of different services need to be developed to support people and help them through the crisis stages while incorporating education at the same time. I think teaching strategies should accommodate kids in the care system to normalise their experiences while teaching them basic skills. We have heard today about basic learning skills, such as essay writing. If you do not have that skill it does not matter what courses are available for adults. There are few courses to teach people early learning skills. Therefore, they cannot enter adult programs because they are not at that level. That is an important point.

There must be a better interdepartmental relationship between the Department of Community Services and the Department of Education and Training. This has been talked about for a long time but the issue has not been addressed adequately. I think teachers should have more information about what issues affect children and young people in care. While mandatory reporting is very important, teachers are not exposed to a lot of knowledge about the various issues and how to support and advocate on behalf of a young person after they make a report.

It is good that these discussions are taking place but they must result in action. I have been out of the system for a long time now but I am hearing the same problems that I experienced. Unless something changes nothing will be done and in 10 or 15 years time we will hear the same issues. I do not think it is fair that you get access to an education and people who are in care do not. I do not think that is acceptable. There might be other opportunities—I think I have done very well for myself; I have been able to draw on other skills, work in other areas and achieve some form of success. However, it has been at great cost and it has been incredibly difficult to get there. I do not think it should be easier for you than it is for me. I think the comments this morning have been great. I am constantly amazed by the courage and experiences of young people, and I think you should take them seriously and try to improve the existing system.

Ms BEAMER: I take it that you have undertaken other educational training beyond Year 8.

Ms TOVEY: I have made a number of different attempts. I have managed to get TAFE certificates to Level 5 and I am doing an advanced diploma at the moment. However, most of that has been through recognised prior learning, which is an alternative to studying. The system accepts that I already have the skills required.

Ms BEAMER: Have you acquired your skills through your jobs?

Ms TOVEY: Yes, essentially. I also have certificates that have been recognised by the different educational institutions. I have a Year 8 level education in terms of the secondary education system. Apart from what I have learned through my work experience, that is all the education I have.

Mr CAMPBELL (CHAIR): Thank you, that has been very helpful. I am conscious that Ms D has been sitting there all morning. Do you want to say something?

Ms D speaks of her education experience

Ms D: I do not have a formal care background. I basically reached a point where I removed myself from the situation, grooved along, landed where I landed and built myself up again. I did not know how much that would interest you. I spent the best part of my life at home—at times not with the best role models. I seemed to do all right at primary school, as every kid does; I just had general problems. However, when I went to high school the situation at home got worse and I had a lot of other issues to do with things that were happening in my community. My school tried to get the department of

Community Services involved to help me, but that failed and my schooling went downhill for a while.

I returned to school in Year 8 but I was put in Year 7 because I did not make the pass mark to be graded in a higher class but my marks were not low enough to be put into a lower class. So I was put into a non-English speaking class and used as a role model to help other people learn to read and write. The next year my marks improved and I was put into a higher class where I was lucky enough to find a teacher who took me under her wing and became my role model. When issues arose at home she was there to deal with them and she helped me to access the school services I needed. But when she left that help fell through and I was left standing there asking, "Where to now?".

I completed my schooling. I did my Higher School Certificate and completed that. I left home just prior to doing my Higher School Certificate and I was advised by a teacher at school at the time there was no way that it was possible to do my Higher School Certificate. The best advice I was given was, as much as I wanted to do it and I was capable of completing it, not to see it as the most important focus. I had to look at my emotional side at that time because I was someone who did not pay attention to my emotions. Schooling was what was important, making sure I got my education. That encouraged me to complete my Higher School Certificate. It was like, yes, I need to deal with this but let's get the Higher School Certificate done and then look at it.

I did not get enough marks to go to university, which was what I wanted to do. My principal did her best to get me into another program at the university. That fell through. I found myself a program at the University of Western Sydney. They accepted me into that. I struggled with that due to homelessness. They accepted that, but once I passed that course and was accepted into university, into a Bachelor of Social Sciences course, I found myself back on the street and I had no support, no-one to help. University lasted two weeks before I had to throw it away. I attended TAFE a year later. The same thing happened, I was fine, I had stability when I started. I lost that stability and TAFE did not really understand that. I fell out of that system. I had no problem getting in but once I was there I had trouble finding support to keep myself there.

Mr CAMPBELL (CHAIR): Thank you, Ms D. Again, we will consider what you have told us today. Something that Ms B and Ms D might want to comment on, when we talk of education, you might think of primary or secondary school, but I think both Ms B and Ms D said there was a lack of support in TAFE as well. It might be the wrong thing for me to conclude that you might think only primary and secondary, but that is something I have drawn out of what you have had to say. That demonstrates that you have taught me something today, if nothing else.

Ms BEAMER: There is certainly no support in tertiary education.

Ms D: When I attended university last year I had to have surgery and there was still no support with that. They just dropped me out of the system and I could not complete my degree. That was the second time, and I have just given up. As far as I am concerned that tertiary system just does not help me, there is no point.

Ms B: I think with the TAFE system, and I not sure about tertiary, because it is a mature age surrounding, the way they treat people is very different to the way someone would be treated in a high school or something like that. When you go today, you are supposed to know what you need. You are supposed to know where you have to be and who you are supposed to be with. It is supposed to be second nature. Like going into anything, a job, school or whatever, you still need to be shown the ropes. That is something the TAFE system lacks. That is one of the reasons why, when I went into the TAFE system, I was in there, but what do I do now? It was a bit intimidating, so I left. I saw a lot of my girlfriends do the same thing because of that.

Mr CAMPBELL (CHAIR): Ms Townsend, would you like to conclude?

The evidence of CREATE Foundation concludes

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes, in conclusion. I could talk about education for the next three days, it is one of those huge things and something that we are so committed to. We have done some work around our report cards through Face-to-Face, which is a national forum of all the stakeholders involved in out of home care, so foster carers as well as government departments, non-government agencies and indigenous agencies as well as children and young people. I have drawn that in a little bit as well. Our biggest thing is that every child and young person who is in the care system should be given whatever opportunities, assistance, resources they need to be able to meet their potential, whatever that may be. They are children like every other child in our society but to whom extraordinary things have happened and that has impacted dramatically on their lives, and it is just a key thing that we can do to redress what has happened to them.

When we collated together what the young people said to us about what they want to meet their education potential: being supported to stay in one school, which, as I talked about earlier, does not happen; to have their confidentiality respected; to be treated like everybody else within the school; to be resourced to fit in with their peers, which means clothing, having a school uniform, that sort of thing; being part of all the extracurricular school activities; to be given flexibility so whatever support and services are put in place the child does not drop out of the school or needs to change schools; to work from strength rather than from a negative base, to make positive assumptions and to be able to participate in planning about their education, which is a major gap within the system now.

In the recent report card we talked about five key actions that we would like to see, and we put these in terms of the New South Wales Government. What we would like to see adopted as a major goal is promoting the educational participation, performance and retention of children and young people in care as the main priority. I hope this group has some educational statistics about how our children and young people in care are performing in New South Wales. We have not seen them. The only statistics we have ever seen are those that have been prepared by Queensland for a sample group. From that we know that our children are up to two years behind their peers. I do not think New South Wales is very different and it concerns me that we do not seem to have that data.

Education in New South Wales does not know when kids are coming into care, where they are placed, whether they are moving schools or anything like that. They do not find out that information. As far as I can tell, the Department of Community Services does not put a high enough priority on education within the planning system for our children and young people, what they need and how they can work together with Education to ensure that this works effectively. We do not know how well these children are performing and we do not know how often they are attending school. In some cases I think we do not know whether they are being suspended or expelled from school. That is a real concern. If we do not have that information it is hard to move forward and put things in place.

The second one that I have talked about quite a lot, and I cannot emphasise this enough, is that all children should have an educational plan. If they have gone into care and we know they will be there for a long time, 12 months, we need to have a plan about how their education is going to proceed and how we are going to give them the resources to reach their potential. Whatever that may be—whether it is tutors, homework help, staying within the same school, going to a specialist school that can best meet their needs—it is critical that we put the planning in place and the resources to match that plan.

The third area that we are very strong on is that we develop, together with the Department of Community Services and the Department of Education and Training collaborative structures at both regional and local levels so that they can deal with the kids that are in need within their areas. We know from working out in the field that often there is a lack of understanding about the needs of children and young people in care, particularly at a teacher and school principal level. We need to overcome that through training and different things. There is a real role there between the departments to break down some of those. There is a need for the two to be talking: these are the young people we have in our regional or local area, these are the services we can bring in, let's work out how to work best. At this time they are working as silos, they are not talking. Case workers are not tapping into what the Department of Education and Training has to offer, and the Department of Education and Training is not necessarily talking back with the Department of Community Services. It is frustrating.

The fourth action is about monitoring and evaluating the participation, performance and retention of children and young people in care and looking at how many individual education plans we have—whether they exist, to start with, and what is their effectiveness? Are our young people who say they have dreams of going on to do their Higher School Certificate actually doing that or are they not given the support somewhere along the line? Are there too many placement changes? Have they dropped out of the system at age 14 or 15 and have not reached their potential, or even what they wanted to do?

That has been the biggest thing for me. It has been hard hearing how many aspirations our children and young people have within the care system that never come to fruition because of all the circumstances happening around them. It is heartbreaking, it really is, to hear them again and again.

The final one is about the New South Wales Government working together with other governments because there are initiatives happening across the country, which I am

sure your team has done some research around. It would be really good to be getting some conversations happening at a national level. I know one that is around is the National Child Protection and Support Services Data Group (NCPASS) is a working group of the National Community Services Information Management Group (NCSIMG) which is now looking at what is the minimum data collection set that we need to have for children and young people in care, in terms of matching our children against national benchmarks of the Years 3, 5 and 7 tests. But there is a lot more room now in terms of talking and sharing information about what is working with programs and so on.

Finally, I would like to say thank you very much for listening to us today about our experiences. It has been a pleasure for all of us to come here and talk to you. You have a huge job ahead of you. There are 8,500 children and young people in the care system now and how many will there be in the future who have not necessarily had a good educational experience? As an inquiry you have the power to change that for all those young people. So it is a big job. Thank you.

Mr CAMPBELL (CHAIR): Thank you, Ms Townsend, and thank you to all of you. I do not usually presume to speak for other members of Parliament but I think I could be confident in saying that what you have given us today is very valuable to us trying to understand what happens on the ground. Just so that you know, what happens with an inquiry like this is that we will talk to a number of people, experts such as yourselves, and people who work in the field, who might call themselves experts but might not be. We will listen to what you have to say and frame some recommendations which will go to the Parliament and then to government. What we actually do may or may not end up being implemented but we would certainly be trying to make some recommendations that would pick up some of the things that you see as gaps in the system and, hopefully, they will be implemented in the future.

....

It has been a long time we have held you here. I appreciate that very much. We will say thank you and wish you all well.

Ms TOWNSEND: If you have any further questions, we are happy to answer them.

Care Leavers of Australia Network submissions

The Committee has also had the opportunity to obtain the views of other people who have been in care, through the assistance of the Care Leavers of Australia Network (CLAN). These views have been expressed in written submissions. Written submissions have been received from:

- Ms Leonie Sheedy, CLAN – Care Leavers of Australia Network (Submissions ECOC 001, ECOC 001.1, ECOC 001.2, ECOC 001.3)
- Mr William Ward (Submission ECOC 002)
- Ms Janette Cave (Submission ECOC 003)
- Mr Des Doneley (Submission ECOC 004)
- [Ms Joy Hill](#) (Submission ECOC 005)
- Ms Verna De Arna (Submission ECOC 007)

- Mr David Campbell MP, Chair, Committee on Children and Young People, on behalf of Mr William Howes (Submission ECOC 008)
- Ms Muriel Willson (Submission ECOC 009, ECOC 009.1)
- Ms Lorraine Rodgers (Submission ECOC 012)
- Ms Georgina Fraser (Submission ECOC 013)
- Ms Elaine Herman (Submissions ECOC 016, ECOC 016.1)
- Ms Leonie Sheedy, CLAN – Care Leavers of Australia Network, on behalf of Mr Keith Kelly (Submission ECOC 019)
- Mr David Forbes (Submission ECOC 020)
- Ms Heather May (Submission ECOC 022)
- Ms Leonie Sheedy, CLAN – Care Leavers of Australia Network, on behalf of Ms Georgina Butler (Submission ECOC 024)
- Mr Anthony Lane (Submission ECOC 028)
- Mrs Venetta Lohse (Submission ECOC 029)
- Mr John Jenkins (Submission ECOC 033)
- Ms Julie Novak (Submission ECOC 037)

The Committee notes that not all correspondents associated with CLAN – Care Leavers of Australia Network have discussed their educational experience in detail.

Ms Leonie Sheedy indicated that CLAN – Care Leavers of Australia Network is a support network for older people raised in orphanages or children's homes. She noted that many members of this organisation have literacy difficulties which result from emotional deprivation, neglect, and physical, sexual and psychological abuse in their childhood.

Mr William Ward indicated that the main issues hampering his education were no parents to assist with homework, a speech impediment, and what he termed an 'out of control corporeal punishment' inflicted by the nuns in and out of the classroom ('trying to learn, under fear, just not possible').

Ms Janette Cave provided a very detailed account of issues involved in the education of children in out-of-home care, including a description and discussion of her care experience from 1954 until 1966, from age 4 years to 16 years (i.e., for the whole of her schooling). She said that she had written a book "The Long Way Home" by Kate Shayler (her pseudonym) about her experiences. She indicated that the overt differences between kids in care and family kids included pocket money, aggressive behaviour, gang behaviour, dress codes, absence from excursions and associated learning, and an inability to contribute in class where the nuclear family was the only recognised mode of care. The recognition of 'homes kids' mainly highlighted the exception – "being in care was held up publicly as an excuse for not being 'normal' in terms of school culture". There were some covert differences between kids in care and family kids including a lack of self esteem and isolation from the main culture. Together these differences affected learning, the individual's belief that "I am worth putting effort into" and the individual's ability to "be a social being in the school context". For Ms Cave, these differences all had a huge impact - "I left school after I completed the School Certificate because I thought I was too dumb to go on and I thought that when I left the home I would be as good as all those family kids". She

wrote that the stigma of having been a homes kid meant that she couldn't talk about her childhood or family as other people did. The care institution did not prepare her well for life outside and school didn't either, but later, in adulthood, she completed the Higher School Certificate and won a scholarship to Macquarie University where she did a Bachelor of Arts degree and Diploma in Education and became a teacher. She completed a Masters Degree at the University of Sydney subsequently. Ms Cave indicated that while she can talk (and does) about her childhood, her brother and sister are still ashamed and don't want anyone to know about their being homes kids – “the stigma, cultured at school, still sticks after forty years”. Ms Cave wrote that since her book has been published she has been contacted by various ex-homes kids who have reported lives of anxiety and depression, substance abuse and deep loneliness that no relationship has been able to erase, with problems parenting their children and great difficulty in self esteem. Ms Cave believes her childhood experiences made her a better teacher of young children, especially new arrivals in Australia, because she understand the impact of feeling abandoned in a foreign culture and needing to be mothered through the experience; and suggesting that the following be included in educational institutional strategies to deal with kids in care:

1. Ensure a school culture where all modes of care are recognised, for example, sole parent, foster care;
2. Encourage respectful discussion at staff meetings and among students of various modes of care, including input from experienced people so discussion is not just a pooling of ignorance or unjustifiable ideas;
3. Encourage social networking for foster children within the school day;
4. Foster children need a school tutor/ counsellor/ confidante with whom they can discuss issues and problems (not sure how this would work in practice);
5. School could be a place where a kid in care can safely explore his/her feelings about his/her family, foster family and future, confidentially;
6. As a significant percentage of fostered children are abused, child protection programs in place must be maintained and mandatory;
7. Enable foster children who move from school to school to report their previous experience to principals in their own terms, reducing the possibility of labels for these students following them wherever they are sent (it may empower them to be who they want to be not who they are expected to be);
8. Possibly a different kind of intake interview needs to be given when a foster child is admitted to a new school;
9. The HSIE curriculum could include material that enables kids to learn to put responsibility for good and bad behaviour where it belongs, and similarly with school discipline policies, etc..

More generally, Ms Cave believes that slightly different focuses are needed in the school care of kids in care – as one possibility, respected, confidential community/church/youth workers could be used to liaise between school and kids in care. Safety and confidentiality are essential because these kids could well feel dispossessed of any rights at all, being shoved from family to family.

Mr Des Doneley described his early life as a State ward and as a foster child, being required to work in a variety of chores (tending fowls, chopping wood, washing and drying dishes) before and after school. Later, in a Salvation Army home he was required to work around the home (kitchen, cleaning, laundry). He also describes being chosen for the annual concert and doing additional training in acrobatics, singing, etc.. Mr Doneley regards the work during fostering and in the home as

exploitative; "... no one gave a damn about our education, which left us backward education wise.". The Government then sent boys out to farms and the girls to domestic jobs: he was sent to a dairy farm where he described the living arrangements and working experiences; "I said to myself, if ever I got married and had a family I would see they had a better life than I had and a better education.". He found that when he was able to put his sons through university "... their education started to rebound on me, where they used to gig at me and try to make an idiot out of me ..."; looking back at his life, he feels that "education to me is like building a home if you don't put a good foundation under it, it will collapse, life is based on the same factor."

Ms Joy Hill wrote that during her school years (1940s and 1950s) she was moved and placed in foster homes and institutions and her education suffered. She acknowledges that in some respects "kids being moved about within their own family situations aren't that much different". However, she believes that what was different was "the uncertainty and trauma associated with new faces all the time", so that she found it difficult to settle into life let alone education. She was assessed with an IQ of 98, and this number followed her between schools and institutions and gave teachers and 'carers' a preconceived idea of her abilities. The "most infuriating lack of education was my high school years spent at Lynwood Hall. We only spent one day per week in the actual school room the rest was spent in learning domesticity (laundry, cooking, scrubbing floors, sewing). The principal's educational idea was to prepare girls for the only capabilities which were assumed they had – domestic bliss. Later, she attempted but didn't pass the public service exams and the nursing entry exams. She comments, "I suppose in my day the Government did what it thought was best for kids in 'care' ...".

Ms Muriel Willson wrote of her life's ambition to study to become a nurse but that a child in poverty had little hope of attaining such dreams. Her childhood was spent being relocated from institution to another/ foster homes, etc., and being denied the opportunity of attending local schools to receive basic education.

Ms Lorraine Rodgers described her early life experiences in orphanages in Victoria and Queensland after been identified as a neglected child when 7 years old. The orphanage in Victoria had a school in the grounds up to sixth grade. She wrote that the teachers couldn't care less about the children – she cannot do sums or spell or say long words. When she went to high school, "it was the most dreadful time in my whole life because I was put on a tall seat in a corner with a Dunces hat on my head as I didn't know what the teacher was talking about, I didn't have a clue, and the other children would laugh at me all the time they saw me". As her schooling was very poor, she was put to work on a farm and then in a factory making shirts, but later began as a nursing assistant which she continued for 30 years. She was unable to train as a nurse due to her lack of education. When she married and had a daughter, she panicked when her daughter began school as she couldn't help her in her homework. She feels that she has failed her daughter's life as well as her own, her marriage didn't last, which she attributes to her feeling unworthy. Ms Rodgers enclosed a short autobiography describing her early life and her search for her family.

Ms Georgina Fraser described her childhood experiences as a State ward in New South Wales institutions and foster homes, writing that she received no education. She struggles to write letters and to communicate to people either verbally or in writing.

She says that while the child she never was died a brutal violent death, the woman she became has a great love and great feeling for the arts. Ms Fraser enclosed a short autobiographical note published in the CLAN Newsletter No. 9 of February 2002.

Ms Elaine Herman described her childhood experiences in New South Wales institutions. She described her school experiences – “there was only one teacher, from kindergarten to sixth form. I was assessed not being intelligent and was taken from the classroom to be utilised as an unpaid domestic servant. Was fourteen before being sent to high school and left at the end of that year.” Her employment was unskilled, factory cleaning and as a nurses aide, then as a clerk; later she attended Sydney Technical College and gained a Certificate Entrance 1 and 2. She wrote, “The growing up in an institution has had a profound effect on me, low self esteem, inability to form close relationships and to trust others”. She commented that children cannot reason or questions to actions of their carers who are in a position of power. Even now, she aspires to achieving higher education.

Mr David Forbes described his childhood experiences as a State ward in New South Wales institutions from the age of eight to sixteen years old. He wrote, "Effectively, my education stopped in Year 2 - the grade I was in when I was taken from my parents. As a result I never learnt to read or write." He indicated that not being able to read “sets you apart from the rest of the world, people treat you as being stupid if you can't read and you avoid telling them and become good at bluffing and making excuses” (e.g., “I don't have my reading glasses on me”). In 1997, he obtained his wardship file and discovered his classification was as ‘mentally retarded’, which seems to have been used to justify the failure to give him an education. He wrote that subsequently, through CLAN – Care Leavers of Australia Network, he attended Mount Druitt TAFE and learnt to read and write through adult education.

Ms Heather May (nee Cameron) described her childhood experiences as a State ward in Queensland institutions. She describes her school experiences as infringed due to the fact that she often had to remain home rather than attend school, in order to care for the younger children and complete domestic tasks. Although Ms May passed Year 10 at school, she is of the view that she would have performed better had she had encouragement and support.

Ms Georgina Butler (nee Fraser) forwarded a copy of an essay on her life in foster care and in Burdurri State Girls Home. While she was denied an education by the welfare system, she has since gone to TAFE and night school.

Mr Anthony Lane wrote that school reports indicated that he was doing well academically in Marsden Home for Boys but no received no further education after entering Wilson Youth Detention Centre in Year 8 as a state ward in Queensland. He briefly resumed schooling after accompanying his mother to Sydney, but lived on street again after his father moved in. He worked in low paid unskilled factory work but now, as a father of three, is enrolled in an adult education course after encouragement from his partner.

Mrs Venetta Lohse discussed the experience of childhood with her sisters in an orphanage. She stressed the hardships that she and her sisters endured while living at

the orphanage. She wrote that her education was neglected. It was only when she went to Randwick TAFE later on in life that she learned how to spell, read and write.

Ms Julie Novak was a state ward from the 1960's and 1970's. Her first schooling in 1966 was in Glebe, then to a one teacher school at Mittagong. After spending time in foster homes she left school at fourteen years of age with little education and obtained a job at Gowings. She has raised seven children, some of whom appear to have had learning difficulties. This added burden of her children having learning problems and the lack of her own education combined with the lack of help from the then Department of Education gave Julie little hope or assistance to her already low self esteem and lack of confidence in dealing with such problems. She did commence a TAFE course in 1991 but felt "she didn't belong".

Concluding comments

The experiences of people who have been in care, as documented in this report and including both the testimony of representatives of the CREATE Foundation and the written submissions from CLAN – Care Leavers Australia Network, support and extend the work of Burnside (Nixon, 2000) and the CREATE Foundation (2002) in identifying the educational needs of children and young people in out-of-home care (see also, e.g., Stein, 1994; Cashmore & Paxman, 1996; Owen, 1996; Jackson & Martin, 1998; Green & Jones, 2002).

To cite just one study, Martin and Jackson (2002) in their recent examination of the educational success of children in care, incorporated the following comments of 38 high-achieving young people who had spent at least a year in residential or foster care:

Being with other people

"I felt that in the care system ... you don't really tend to meet everyday people, and that's obviously when clubs and societies outside of school are quite good. Like Cubs or Girl Guides really because you're out in a different environment and that obviously would affect how you see things"

"I think they should be given more money to spend for their educational things, like say if they wanted to go on an outdoor pursuit course"

"With my drama, music, sport, I needed to have the encouragement and resources. So if someone was in that position, I would make sure they had the resources and didn't feel out of it in terms of their clothing and their mixing with friends"

"It's not just about education, it should be like making it more normal for them to have hobbies and things. When people are thinking of education they should be thinking about developing the whole of that person"

Encouragement from others

"It's about staff encouraging and taking an interest in the children they care for, and even if the kid isn't motivated to keep on trying to get them to do their best".

“I needed someone there for me and to praise me when I did something right ... there was no positive reinforcement, there is hardly any at all in the care system”.

“Simple things like encouragement is what’s lacking in basic institutions like children’s homes ... also emotional support”.

Characteristics of carers

“I think there needs to be legislation for residential care ... there is no reason for not having qualified workers, workers who can build your self-esteem and encourage educationally ... and it should extend to foster care as well”

The contribution of social workers

“My social worker at the time I never saw because he assumed everything was OK because I seemed to be a stable person, but I wasn’t, I was anxious. I could have gained by having the situation monitored more closely”

Attending school regularly

“Mothers know if they don’t send their children to school they are breaking the law ... well I think the law should be the same for children in care. I missed years of school. But the general attitude is that it doesn’t matter if you don’t go to school or not”

The Committee notes the summary comments of Martin and Jackson (2002, p.129):

- Going to school is the normal experience of children, and those in care should be as much like the others as possible. Regular school attendance should be assumed and enforced.
- Looked-after children should be given the maximum encouragement to participate in school and out-of-school activities. This is another aspect of normalisation and promoting resilience. Financial considerations should not be allowed to stand in their way.
- Children in care should be given opportunities to meet and spend time with people outside of the care system.
- Social workers and carers should take a keen interest in education and convey that to the child by providing good facilities for study and showing appreciation for achievement.
- Foster carers and residential workers need better educational qualifications themselves if they are to promote young people’s educational attainment.
- The educational environment and practical resources for study in residential units require urgent attention.
- Schools and teachers should be better informed about the care system. Good communication between social workers and schools is essential.
- Low expectations about the ability and potential of children in care need to be challenged.
- Young people in higher education need continuing support, financial, practical and emotional.

References

Cashmore, J. & Paxman, M. (1996). *Wards leaving care: A longitudinal study*. Sydney: NSW Department of Community Services.

Committee on Children and Young People (2001). *The importance of education for children in out-of-home care*. Sonia Jackson - The 2nd Macquarie Street Lecture for Children and Young People, 31 October 2001. Fifth report from the Committee on Children and Young People of the 52nd Parliament. Sydney, NSW: Parliament of New South Wales.

Committee on Children and Young People (in preparation). *Promising practice strategies for family foster care and current policy challenges*. Peter J. Pecora. The Fourth Macquarie Street Lecture for Children and Young People, 30 August 2002. Sixteenth report of the Committee on Children and Young People of the 52nd Parliament. Sydney, NSW: Parliament of New South Wales.

CREATE Foundation (2002). *Australian children and young people in care: Report card on education*. September 2002. Coorparoo, QLD: CREATE Foundation.

Green, S. & Jones, A. (2002). *Improving outcomes for young people leaving care*. *Foster Care News – WA*, 28 (1, January). Website: http://www.fcawa.com.au/new_page_11.htm, accessed Thursday 26 September 2002, Foster Care Association of WA.

Jackson, S. & Martin, P.Y. (1998). *Surviving the care system: education and resilience*. *Journal of Adolescence*, 21, 569-583.

Martin, P.Y. & Jackson, S. (2002). *Educational success for children in public care: Advice from a group of high achievers*. *Child & Family Social Work*, 7(2), 121-130.

Nixon, D. (2000). *The educational needs of children and young people in out of home care – Making the grade because children matter*. North Parramatta, NSW: Burnside.

Owen, J. (Ed.) (1996). *Every childhood lasts a lifetime – Personal stories from the frontline of family breakdown*. Brisbane, QLD: Australian Association of Young People in Care.

Stein, M. (1994). *Leaving care, education and career trajectories*. *Oxford Review of Education*, 20, 349-360.

APPENDIX 1

CREATE Foundation (2002). Australian children and young people in care: Report card on education. September 2002.

**EXTRACTS FROM THE MINUTES OF THE
COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE REGARDING THE INQUIRY INTO
THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE**

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

PROCEEDINGS

**11:00 A.M., THURSDAY 14 FEBRUARY 2002
AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, SYDNEY**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Legislative Council Assembly

Ms Burnswoods
Mr Primrose
Mr Harwin
Mr Tsang

Legislative

Mr Campbell
Ms Andrews
Mr Webb
Mr Smith
Ms Beamer

The Chair, Mr Campbell, presiding.

Also in attendance: Mr Gönye, Acting/Committee Manager, Ms Callinan, Project Officer, Ms Dart, Committee Officer, and Ms Tanzer, Assistant Committee Officer.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Corbett.

....

3. Chair's report

...

Inquiry into Education for Children in Out of Home Care

The Chair informed the Committee that the Ministerial Reference with the suggested Terms of Reference for the new inquiry into the education outcomes of children in out-of-home care, has been received from the Minister for Community Services, the Hon. Faye Lo Po' MP. The suggested terms of reference are:

1. Identify the major issues and barriers related to the education and training of children and young people living in out of home care.
2. Advise on ways to monitor the education progress and outcomes of children and young people living in out of home care.

3. Identify and advise on good practices and effective strategies for enhancing the education performance and outcomes of children and young people in out of home care.

On the motion of Ms Burnswood, seconded by Ms Beamer:

That the Committee accept the Terms of Reference proposed by reference from the Minister for Community Services and commence the inquiry.

Passed unanimously

....

6. General business

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned at 11:30 a.m.

Chair

Acting Manager

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

PROCEEDINGS

**10:00 A.M., FRIDAY 15 MARCH 2002
AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, SYDNEY**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Legislative Council Assembly

Ms Burnswoods

Mr Primrose

Mr Harwin

Legislative

Mr Campbell

Ms Andrews

Mr Cull

Mr Smith

Mrs Hopwood

The Chair, Mr Campbell, presiding.

Also in attendance: Mr Faulks, Committee Manager, Ms Callinan, Project Officer, Ms Dart, Committee Officer, and Ms Tanzer, Assistant Committee Officer.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Corbett, Mr Tsang and Ms Beamer.

....

4. Inquiry into education for children in out-of-home care

The Chair advised that he had launched the inquiry into educational outcomes of children in out-of-home care on Thursday 14 March 2002. The terms of reference for the inquiry into the educational outcomes of children in out-of-home care will be advertised in the major metropolitan newspapers on Saturday 16 March 2002.

....

7. General business

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned at 11:40 a.m.

Chair

Manager

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

PROCEEDINGS

**10:00 A.M., FRIDAY 22 MARCH 2002
AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, SYDNEY**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Legislative Council

Mr Harwin
Mr Primrose

Legislative Assembly

Mr Campbell
Ms Andrews
Mr Cull
Ms Beamer
Mrs Hopwood

The Chair, Mr Campbell, presiding.

Also in attendance: Mr Faulks, Committee Manager, Ms Callinan, Project Officer, Ms Dart, Committee Officer, and Ms Tanzer, Assistant Committee Officer.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Tsang, Mr Corbett, Ms Burnswoods and Mr Smith.

....

7. Inquiry into the education of children in out-of-home care

The Chair requested Members to alert interested organisations and groups of the commencement of the inquiry into the education of children in out-of-home care, and indicated that the Secretariat would supply further copies of the terms of reference and background information as needed.

8. General business

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned at 10:20 a.m.

Chair

Manager

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

PROCEEDINGS

**7:00 P.M., TUESDAY 9 APRIL 2002
AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, SYDNEY**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Legislative Council

Mr Harwin
Mr Primrose
Ms Burnswoods
Mr Corbett
Mr Tsang

Legislative Assembly

Mr Campbell
Ms Andrews
Mr Cull
Mr Smith
Mrs Hopwood

The Chair, Mr Campbell, presiding.

Also in attendance: Mr Faulks, Committee Manager, Ms Dart, Committee Officer, and Ms Tanzer, Assistant Committee Officer.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Ms Beamer.

3. Chair's report

....

Inquiry into education for children in out-of-home care

The Chair advised that as part of the advertising of the inquiry into educational outcomes of children in out-of-home care the Committee had, in partnership with the Care Leavers Australia Network (CLAN), prepared and posted a newsletter alerting the Network's membership to the inquiry. The Committee noted and endorsed comments by Ms Burnswoods that the terms of reference for the inquiry requires examination of current practices and current issues, and that matters relating to historical policies and practices are relevant by reference only.

....

6. General business

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Chair

Manager

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

PROCEEDINGS

**9:30 A.M., THURSDAY 30 MAY 2002
AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, SYDNEY**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Legislative Council

Mr Harwin
Mr Primrose
Ms Burnswoods
Mr Tsang

Legislative Assembly

Mr Campbell
Ms Andrews
Mr Cull
Mrs Hopwood

The Chair, Mr Campbell, presiding.

Also in attendance: Mr Faulks, Committee Manager, Ms Samuels, Project Officer, Ms Dart, Committee Officer, and Ms Tanzer, Assistant Committee Officer.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Corbett, Mr Smith, and Ms Beamer.

....

4. Inquiry into education for children in out-of-home care

The Chair reported that, to date, the Committee had received 35 submissions for the inquiry into education issues affecting children in out-of-home care. Major submissions received include: Office of the Children's Guardian; Barnados; Marist Youth Care; Centacare; Anglicare; Uniting Care Burnside; CREATE Foundation; Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA); Department of Education and Training; Board of Studies; NSW Teachers Federation; Commission for Children and Young People; and Council of Social Services. The Committee has been notified by Mission Australia and Youth Off The Streets that submissions are being prepared.

The Chair noted that submissions received with the assistance of CLAN -- Care Leavers Australia Network had rarely addressed education issues affecting children in

out-of-home care but had rather been general comments regarding their individual experiences of the care situation.

It is proposed that public hearings for the inquiry into education issues affecting children in out-of-home care will commence in the second half of July 2002.

....

13. General business

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

Chair

Manager

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

PROCEEDINGS

**10:00 A.M., FRIDAY 30 AUGUST 2002
AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, SYDNEY**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Legislative Council

Mr Primrose
Ms Burnswoods

Legislative Assembly

Mr Campbell
Ms Andrews
Mr Smith
Ms Beamer

The Chair, Mr Campbell, presiding.

Also in attendance: Mr Faulks, Committee Manager.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Cull, Mr Tsang, Mr Harwin, Mr Corbett and Mrs Hopwood.

....

9. Inquiry into the education of children in out-of-home care

The Chair reported that to date 55 submissions had been received (40 primary submissions, with another 15 further submissions).

The Chair noted that several hearing dates had been set down, including Friday 13 September 2002 and Friday 27 September 2002. While Friday 20 September was reserved to examine the recent reports of the Commission for Children and Young People, evidence regarding the inquiry into the education of children in out-of-home care would be taken on that day.

It was proposed that evidence would be taken from witnesses including:

- Department of Community Services
- Children's Guardian
- Association of Children's Welfare Agencies

- Uniting Care Burnside
- CREATE Foundation
- Centacare Catholic Community Services Foster Care Program
- Barnados
- Commission for Children and Young People
- Commissioner for Community Services
- Department of Education and Training
- Office of the Board of Studies
- NSW Teachers Federation
- Anglicare
- Mission Australia
- Council of Social Service of New South Wales
- Marist Community Services
- Youth Off The Streets
- Glen Mervyn Young Womens Health Program, Australian Red Cross
- Positive Justice Centre

The Chair noted that he had scheduled two additional meeting dates, Monday 14 October 2002 and Tuesday 15 October 2002, for public hearings and visits of inspection.

On the motion of Mr Primrose, seconded Ms Beamer:

That the Committee conduct visits of inspection regarding the inquiry into the education of children in out-of-home care.

Passed unanimously.

10. General business

...

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned at 10:10 a.m.

Chair

Manager

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

PROCEEDINGS

**10:00 A.M., FRIDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 2002
AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, SYDNEY**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Legislative Council

Mr Harwin
Ms Burnswoods
Mr Primrose

Legislative Assembly

Mr Campbell
Ms Beamer
Mrs Hopwood
Ms Andrews

Also in attendance: Mr Faulks, Committee Manager, Ms Samuels, Project Officer, Ms Young, Committee Officer, and Ms Tanzer, Assistant Committee Officer.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Cull, Mr Smith, Mr Tsang and Mr Corbett.

2. Previous Minutes

On the motion of Ms Beamer, seconded by Mr Campbell, the minutes of meeting No. 22, having been distributed previously, were accepted unanimously as being a true and accurate record.

3. Public hearing for the inquiry into the education of children in out-of-home care

The Chair, exercising his discretion under S.O. 335, excluded all members of the public not directly associated with CREATE Foundation.

The Chair directed that the evidence of several witnesses be amended such that the witnesses' evidence would not reveal private details.

**Ms Michelle Townsend, CREATE Foundation
Ms Sarah Ludowici, CREATE Foundation**

Ms Michelle Tovey, CREATE Foundation
Person identified as Ms A
Person identified as Ms B
Person identified as Mrs C
Person identified as Mr E
Person identified as Ms D

were called and sworn.

The witnesses acknowledged receipt of a summons issued by the Chair under the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901.

The witnesses were examined by the Chair and Members of the Committee.

Evidence completed, the witnesses withdrew.

The public were admitted.

....

6. General business

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned at 3:30 p.m..

Chair

Manager

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

PROCEEDINGS

**10:00 A.M., FRIDAY 27 SEPTEMBER 2002
AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, SYDNEY**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Legislative Council

Mr Harwin
Ms Burnswoods

Legislative Assembly

Mr Campbell
Ms Beamer
Mrs Hopwood
Mr Smith
Mr Cull

Also in attendance: Mr Faulks, Committee Manager, Ms Samuels, Project Officer, Ms Young, Committee Officer, and Ms Tanzer, Assistant Committee Officer.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Primrose, Ms Andrews, Mr Tsang and Mr Corbett.

....

4. Consideration of draft report: "Voices: The education experience of children and young people in out-of-home care"

The Chair presented the draft report: "Voices: The education experience of children and young people in out-of-home care". The report incorporates the the testimony of the representatives of CREATE Foundation, and summaries of written submissions received from CLAN – Care Leavers Australia Network.

The draft report was accepted as having been read.

The draft report was agreed to.

On the motion of Mr Smith, seconded Mr Harwin:

That the draft report: "Voices: The education experience of children and young people in out-of-home care", be read and agreed to.

Passed unanimously.

On the motion of Mr Smith, seconded Mr Harwin:

That the draft report: "Voices: The education experience of children and young people in out-of-home care" be accepted as a report of the Committee on Children and Young People, and that it be signed by the Chair and presented to the House.

Passed unanimously.

On the motion of Mr Smith, seconded Mr Harwin:

That the Chair and Manager be permitted to correct any stylistic, typographical and grammatical errors in the report.

Passed unanimously.

....

6. General business

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned at 4:05 p.m..

Chair

Manager