

Strategic Plan 2024 – 2027



create
FOUNDATION

Acknowledgement of Country

CREATE Foundation acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples, Traditional Owners and custodian caretakers of the lands, skies and waters where we live and work. We pay deep respect to Elders, knowledge holders and community leaders across all First Nations communities – metro, regional, rural and remote – and all Traditional Homelands.

We acknowledge that Australia is culturally rich with the oldest living cultures on earth. And we acknowledge over 60,000 years of a multi-layered, support focused, moiety system and kinship structure, raising kids strong, connected to Culture, Ancestors, Dreaming, Kin, Community and Country.



Acknowledgement of lived experience

CREATE acknowledges all the children and young people with lived or living experience of child protection and care systems, and all the related systems around them. CREATE acknowledges people with lived experience as the experts when it comes to understanding what's working and what needs to change in these systems. CREATE acknowledges the often-profound impacts of a care experience on children and young people and that some young people experience adversity before, during and after their time in care. CREATE also acknowledges the immense wisdom, resourcefulness and creativity of young people in finding ways to recover from adverse life experiences, have their needs met and have their voices heard. The deficit is within the systems, not the individuals.

The story of how we got here

CREATE Foundation turned 25 years old in 2024. Building on the work of the Australian Association of Young People In Care through the 1990s, CREATE was founded in 1999 at a collective network meeting in Brisbane. Since then, CREATE has grown to be a valued national consumer body that lives and breathes children's rights and voices.

CREATE has adapted to changing sector and community contexts in recent years, and this plan reflects our current understanding of what young people have told us about their priorities over the next three years.

This Strategic Plan has been informed by the voices of hundreds of children and young people, providing feedback through our CREATE 'smiley survey' over the last two years, and through our recent pulse check survey. We wanted to know what's working, what we can do better, what young people want to see more of at CREATE and anything getting in the way of children and young people engaging with our programs and advocacy opportunities. We have also gathered targeted feedback from young people attending our programs, and through Youth Advisory Groups and Youth Forums.

We also wanted to hear from government, sector and community partners about how CREATE can continue evolving in a changing sector context. We did this through a pulse check with stakeholders to find out about how our stakeholders see CREATE's role in the broader sector and how we can better collaborate with other organisations to advance our mission, alongside young people.

We also ran a pulse check with the people who work at CREATE – the people who live and breathe our mission. Our people had lots of ideas about how we can creatively adapt to work more effectively to respond to the emerging needs and priorities of children and young people.

We also worked with our National Experience to Action Board (Youth) to shape our Strategic Plan, a group which brings together young people from every state and territory to provide strategic advice and shape CREATE's priorities. We sought cultural advice to bring First Nations cultural perspectives to this plan. And we worked with CREATE's leadership team and Board to make sure we are fully enabled to implement this Strategic Plan.

This plan is the result of this combined effort, which will guide our work, orient us, challenge us and help us know what difference we're making in the lives of children and young people.



Cultural Advisor

CREATE wants to thank Aunty Tammy for her support and cultural perspective in shaping this Strategic Plan.

Tammy Solomon is a Kuku Yalanji Woman from Far North Queensland/Southern Cape York. She is a Community Elder where she lives and works. She has deep system knowledge from more than 20 years of experience working in the child protection sector, striving to ensure Culture, Kin and Community are valued for every First Nations child in care. She was formerly a Board member for Carbal Aboriginal Service, Probation and Parole Queensland, and a Logan Police Elders Committee member. Aunty Tammy is currently Managing Director of Mullah Mara Together, a founding Board member of Rise Whichway, and a founding Board member of community controlled Two Hands Aboriginal Corporation.

As a friend and collaborator with CREATE, Aunty Tammy has delivered cultural awareness training to CREATE's staff and provided reflective advice and support to CREATE.



CREATE's National Experience to Action Board (Youth)

CREATE's National Experience to Action Board (Youth) also known as NEABY, is our recently expanded lived experience governance group within CREATE. It's made up of young people from all states and territories who come together regularly to guide CREATE's policy positions and advocacy directions. Each of our members has a really clear vision for the change they want to see. Here are some of their words of wisdom:

"I am passionate about advocating and making change for children and young people with an out-of-home care experience. Through my journey, I have learned that one of my most powerful tools is my voice."
(Tayla, our member for the ACT)

"[NEABY will] provide me with a comfortable space for me to voice out my opinions and concerns about the out-of-home care system and allow me to be able to contribute to the betterment of other young people in out-of-home care."
(Tommy, our member for NSW)

"It's important to me to be able to speak up and advocate for those who are still in care and feel like they aren't being heard."
(Sarah, our member for SA)

"I would like to create positive change for kids with a background in care."
(Keely, our member for NT)

"Sharing my experiences to better the out-of-home care sector is a huge passion of mine. Being a part of NEABY will allow me to push my passion further."
(Cheyenne, our member for WA)

"I have a passion for people and want to be able to voice some issues and resolutions to improve areas within the care system."
(Ann, our member for TAS)

"I am passionate about making meaningful change in the care system and ensuring rights of children in care are upheld."
(Harper, our member for VIC)

"I want to ensure that EVERY child and young person is able to feel safe in their houses. I can't wait to work with all our wonderful Young Consultants throughout the country."
(Jayden, our member for QLD)



Statement from our Board Chair

CREATE is an organisation with a rich history and a compelling mission. It's also an organisation that is adaptive and creative in responding to new opportunities and the emergent needs and aspirations of children and young people.

This Strategic Plan is intended to carry CREATE forward in a dynamic and evolving contemporary context. It shows our commitment to supporting young people to connect with community, feel empowered and influence change to make things better for all kids in care.

The plan also highlights additional commitments, based on the direct feedback of young people, community, sector and CREATE staff, to guide our continuing work alongside children and young people. It calls on us to be inclusive, innovative and proactive.

These next three years are going to be transformative for CREATE as we try some new ideas, find new ways to work creatively and meaningfully alongside children and young people, amplify our advocacy, collaborate deeply with sector partners, and strengthen our commitments to self-determination and cultural safety.

This next phase in CREATE's journey will involve new frontiers and opportunities for CREATE as a national leader in youth participation.

Thank you to all the young people, and others across the CREATE community for your engagement and support. I welcome you to this Strategic Plan and invite you to join with us in collective action alongside children and young people to elevate their voices and their rights.

Jann Skinner
Chair and Treasurer
CREATE Foundation



Statement from our CEO

This Strategic Plan marks an inflection point in our work at CREATE. After a lot of changes over recent years, this plan is a declaration of our passion and commitment to walk alongside children and young people with a care experience, to elevate their voices and rights, and to revisit our mission in a changing sector landscape. This will help us to make sure we are evolving with the emerging needs and perspectives of young people and the changing context in which we live and work.

What I love about CREATE is that every aspect of our business is positioned around lived experience and child-centred practice. We are a creative, adaptive and innovative organisation. We create community and belonging for young people, we take creative risks in trying new things and supporting our people to innovate, and we are tireless in showing up to advocate alongside young people. We hold a vision for the change that's possible if we listen to the voices of the people who know most about child protection and care systems – the children and young people who have experienced them first-hand.

This Strategic Plan is about setting the direction for CREATE for the next three years, while leaving space for us to innovate and adapt as we learn new things along the way from what young people are experiencing.

I want to thank all the young people who show us the way every day, engage in our programs and advocacy, and tell us when we can do better. I also want to thank all our government, sector and community partners (including carers), who support CREATE and know the value and power of listening to those who know how things really are – the children and young people.

This is an invitation to work together over the next three years to make a difference in the lives of kids and keep CREATE growing strong and evolving so we can truly be of value to children and young people.

Imogen Edeson
Chief Executive Officer
CREATE Foundation



Our commitment to young people

It's really the young people who bring the CREATE community to life and show us the way forward for system change, based on their lived experience and expertise. Young people are the heart and soul of CREATE. Everything we do is with and for young people.

Children and young people's voices matter. CREATE is committed to listening to young people and finding ways to make sure young people's voices are listened to by decision-makers.

CREATE exists to help young people connect with community, feel empowered and influence change to make things better for all kids in care. To do this, we will keep listening to young people as the leaders who know most about what changes are needed to improve things for kids in care.



Our commitment to First Nations people

CREATE Foundation recognises First Nations peoples as the traditional owners of Australia, including its lands and waterways. CREATE supports self-determination for First Nations peoples, including justice, truth-telling and equity.

CREATE respects the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to maintain culture and to lead decisions that affect their lives, families and communities. CREATE acknowledges the historical, current and continued impacts of colonisation, racism and intergenerational trauma, resulting in the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care. As an ally, CREATE is deeply committed to supporting self-determined approaches to addressing the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, designed and delivered by First Nations communities and organisations in culturally rich ways.

CREATE is committed to listening deeply to the voices of First Nations children, young people, families and

communities, and the services that support them. CREATE is committed to engaging in continuous listening, learning and reflection around how we ensure our programs and advocacy are culturally safe and culturally informed, how we can foster a safe and inclusive organisational culture that embraces the cultural perspectives of First Nations staff, and how we can support major transformation of systems and services towards Aboriginal-led and self-determined systems, responses and practices.

To guide us in this process, we will be developing a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) in collaboration with Reconciliation Australia and other First Nations partners. We believe that a RAP will provide a framework to truly understand how we are going in acting on our commitments, addressing any biases or blind spots, and working to be a culturally safe place for kids and their communities.



Why CREATE is needed

As the national consumer organisation representing the voices of children and young people with an out-of-home care experience, we live and breathe our commitment to elevating the rights and voices of kids. While many peak bodies represent the interests of other organisations as their members, CREATE's members are actually people – children and young people with a care experience. And right now, we have over 30,000 members.

CREATE genuinely meets a need and a system gap for young people. We are independent from both government and service providers, and we are uniquely centred around the lived experience of children and young people who have had contact with care and protection systems.

We want to continue our legacy of being a safe, meaningful, responsive community where children and young people with a care experience can come together to connect, feel seen and heard, and feel a sense of belonging and empowerment.

We also really want to step up and work alongside young people with lived experience to influence major system change to improve experiences and outcomes for children.

Utilising our partners, and building strong relationships with First Nations organisations, will help us engage in collective action to influence positive change, alongside young people.

Demand for CREATE services continues to grow and over the next three years, we will aim to expand our programs and advocacy and respond to this growing need in creative and adaptive ways, based on what young people tell us they need from CREATE.



Our Mission

Creating a better life for children and young people in care.

To do this, we:

CONNECT children and young people to each other, CREATE, and the community to

EMPOWER children and young people to build the confidence and skills that enable them to have a voice and be heard to

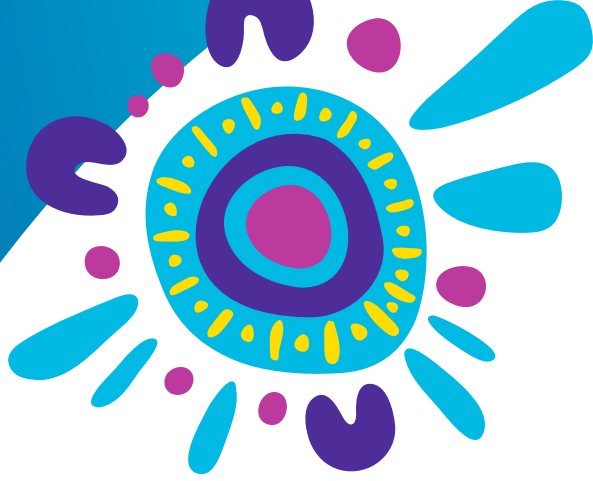
CHANGE the systems that impact children and young people, in consultation with them, through advocacy to improve policies, practices and services, and increase community awareness

Our Vision

All children and young people with a care experience reach their full potential.

Core Principles

- Children and young people are the centre of our work and their voices inform everything we do.
- We provide safe spaces, fun activities and meaningful opportunities for children and young people.
- Our practice is safe, inclusive and responsive to diverse experiences of culture, gender, sexuality, disability and neurodiversity.
- We support the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities to self-determination.
- Our advocacy is independent, brave and based directly on what we hear from children and young people.
- We believe that adults need to listen to the voices of children and young people to support their safety and wellbeing.
- We believe that people with lived experience know best about what works and what needs to change.
- Partnerships with government, sector, carers and communities are critical to our effectiveness.
- We look after our people, support their wellbeing and help them to feel empowered and grow in their work.
- We are creative and child-friendly.
- We are always learning and innovating.



Our challenges

- **Change** – At times, we need to navigate periods of organisational change because young people’s needs and priorities change over time and the community context is changing. To do this, we need to know how to adapt, support our strong teams, ensure continued program delivery, keep our stakeholder relationships strong, and make sure our work is always aligned to our mission.
- **Resourcing** – Like all other organisations working in the community services sector, we are experiencing increased demand for our programs and reduced resourcing to deliver it.
- **Complexity** – Our operating environment is complex because we work across different jurisdictions, all with different legislative, policy, regulatory, funding and quality frameworks.
- **Breadth** – We are a small team with an ambitious program of work and many different government, sector and community partners.
- **Balancing consistency and flexibility** – Working across so many locations, systems and communities, we need to ensure we have strong and consistent programs and practices, while also being flexible and responsive to local opportunities and the diverse and changing needs of young people.
- **Evolving sector** – We work in an evolving sector, so we need to be adaptive to remain contemporary and relevant because there is a continuing need for CREATE among children and young people.

Our strengths

- **Lived experience** – We have deep expertise in safely and meaningfully engaging with kids with lived experience, empowering young people, and embedding young voices and feedback in everything we do.
- **Connections and community** – We know how to build strong and respectful relationships with children and young people and create a safe community for them to connect with others and feel a sense of belonging.
- **Commitment to First Nations self-determination** – We nurture deep, active and meaningful connections with First Nations organisations. We support community-led approaches to meeting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids, and we have a living commitment to strengthening CREATE’s cultural capabilities to ensure our practice is culturally safe.
- **Inclusion and diversity** – We are always learning and reflecting on identity, power, inclusion and equity. We are enriched by diverse voices within our team, among the children and young people we represent, and across the community. CREATE is committed to inclusive practice and working in responsive ways with young people with diverse life experiences and identities.
- **People** – We have a team that is deeply committed to children and young people and we value our team, support their leadership and growth, and appreciate their expertise.
- **Collaboration** – We’re all in this together and it takes lots of voices and lots of action to create collective impact. We’re interested in truly partnering with young people, advocates, sector, government, community and philanthropic organisations. Everyone has a role to play to make things better for kids in care.
- **Reach and focus** – As a national organisation, we are able to look across states and territories to identify good practice and innovative models of care, and help transfer knowledge, learning and innovations through our advocacy. We also have deep local knowledge and relationships within each state and territory so we can support young people in targeted ways and influence change in local systems.
- **Dynamic** – We are agile and flexible, and take initiative when it comes to meeting the needs of children and young people and creating new opportunities. Because we’re a small team, we can try new things, adapt our practice and scale great ideas quickly.
- **Creativity and imagination** – We listen to children and young people’s voices and use this knowledge to help find creative and innovative ways to act on what they say, in partnership with them.
- **Courage** – Because we’re independent, we can be brave in our advocacy. Children and young people deserve strong and honest advocacy with and for them.

CREATE's advocacy priorities

Relationships

Like everyone, children and young people need safe, responsive and meaningful relationships to be safe and well. This means trusted relationships with safe adults who listen to them, act on what they say, show warmth and show up for them in an ongoing way. Unfortunately, children and young people in care often experience disrupted relationships with family, carers and caseworkers. CREATE is fiercely committed to influencing systems, policy frameworks, service models and practice approaches to elevate relationships as the most important thing when it comes to child safety and wellbeing. We envisage a future care system that operates as a 'care community' of networked relationships, that prioritise children's right to safe, enduring and responsive relationships as a paramount concern.

Safety and stability in care

Every child deserves someone who consistently shows up for them with warmth and care. CREATE acknowledges that relational safety and continuity are essential for the wellbeing and development of children and young people. For those in care, when living with family isn't an option, stable placement arrangements are critical. This means placements that prioritise young people's sense of safety and respond to their individual needs, minimising disruption in their lives and supporting continuity of caring relationships and community connections. Children and young people also need to be actively involved in placement decisions so they have a say about where they live.

Rights, diversity and inclusion

Every young person has a right to be affirmed in their unique identity, and receive inclusive support that empowers them to thrive physically, emotionally, culturally and socially. CREATE advocates for shifts to a rights-based child protection system that elevates the voices and rights of children and young people. This means policies and systems that enable children and young people to be involved in decision-making about their individual journey in care, as well as decision-making about system reform. It also means service models and practice approaches that are safe and responsive to young people with different abilities, cultural backgrounds, genders and sexualities, and neurodiversity.





Residential care

CREATE advocates for a systemic shift towards family preservation and early intervention when there are safety and wellbeing concerns for children. CREATE also advocates for home-based and relational care models that meet children's developmental and relational needs through continuity of relationships with carers. Where residential options are needed, CREATE calls for major improvements to the quality, stability, safety and model of care through better home environments in residential settings, smaller homes (unless catering for sibling groups), staffing models and practice approaches that prioritise meaningful relationships between workers and young people, and therapeutic models that address a holistic range of issues and needs affecting young people, with a particular focus on addressing mental health needs.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led and designed approaches are essential for meeting the needs of First Nations children and young people, and reducing the disproportionate number of First Nations children in statutory care. CREATE supports Aboriginal-led commissioning to put resources and decision-making power in the hands of First Nations communities, including proportionate investment in the community controlled sector to enable culturally-informed services, based on community need. CREATE recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's right to connection to Country, culture, lore, spiritual systems, cultural protocols and practices, language, kin, clan and community as a major protective factor that can heal families, embody identity, reclaim pride and grow kids strong. CREATE also supports data sovereignty for First Nations communities and Aboriginal-led oversight of child protection systems, including dedicated Commissioners for Aboriginal Children and Young People in all jurisdictions, with a full mandate to oversee all systems impacting on the lives of First Nations children and young people.

Sibling, kin and family connection

In line with children and young people's individual wishes, the care system should prioritise ongoing opportunities to nurture sibling, kin and family relationships while they are living in out-of-home care. These connections serve as a protective factor, promoting identity and meaning, relational continuity, and emotional resilience. These connections also enhance stability, and promote a sense of belonging among young people who may be facing disruptions in other aspects of life. Above all, it's what young people tell us they need and want.



Health and wellbeing

Children and young people in care often experience more health challenges than their peers, both while in care and after care, which can impact long-term quality of life and health outcomes. Child safety and health systems need to work together to prioritise access to assessments, early intervention services and targeted specialist supports for children and young people in care, tailored to meet their unique needs. CREATE calls for comprehensive health assessments for children entering care, health assessments annually while in care, access enhancements for young people living in regional areas, priority access and express pathways to diagnostic services and NDIS supports, and targeted mental health service models for young people in care that address the impacts of trauma.

Education

Equitable access to quality education for young people in out-of-home care is essential for their development and access to opportunities to work towards their aspirations and interests. However, children and young people in care commonly experience major disruption to their education, barriers to participate and stigma. CREATE is committed to mobilising partners across education and child protection sectors to do better for children and young people in care, through practice improvements, better placement decisions, transport solutions to get to school, flexible funding to cover school gear, streamlined permissions to engage in school activities, bridging programs and alternative education pathways, and dismantling barriers and stigma that make it hard for children and young people to engage in education.



Youth justice and raising the age

Australian youth justice systems need urgent and major reform so that children and young people are no longer criminalised or detained. CREATE believes that children with a care experience (particularly those living in residential care) are disproportionately criminalised as a result of social disadvantage, experiences of adversity and trauma, the impact of racism, poverty, unsafe and unstable housing, unsupported mental health needs and substance issues, and practice issues resulting in high levels of contact with police. In line with overwhelming evidence and expert opinion, CREATE strongly believes that raising the age of criminal responsibility is a critical step in reforming the youth justice system. This means all Australian governments should raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years (without exception), the minimum age of detention to 16 years, and invest in comprehensive diversion and early intervention supports, to reduce offending and interrupt cycles of contact with justice systems into adulthood. CREATE also calls for child-centred, trauma-informed and therapeutic services for all children who come into contact with the criminal justice system.



Transitions to independence

Young people often describe transitioning from care to independence as a stressful, unsupported and unsafe experience. CREATE calls on all jurisdictions to implement and maintain robust transition support packages (that include adequate allowances) to ensure real choices and housing options for young people. This must be supported by arrangements that allow young people to engage in work or study aligned with their aspirations. CREATE advocates for supports, allowances and housing guarantees for young people leaving care up to the age of 25 years. CREATE will continue to monitor transition packages available in each jurisdiction to ensure young people receive equitable opportunities and resources for their emergence into independence.



Our mission and goals

OUR MISSION:



CONNECT children and young people to each other, CREATE and their community.

OUR GOALS:

Children and young people feel a sense of connection and belonging when engaging with CREATE.

CREATE's programs meet a critical gap for children and young people, including opportunities to connect with each other and with their communities in meaningful ways.

Increased regional engagement so young people living in regional areas get more access to CREATE programs and advocacy opportunities.

CREATE's programs meet the different needs of younger children, tweens, teens and young adults.

OUR MISSION:



EMPOWER children and young people to build the confidence and skills that enable them to have a voice and be heard.

OUR GOALS:

Young people are empowered with life skills and confidence.

Children and young people have access to opportunities to influence policy, practice and systems.

Young people are supported to access mentoring and leadership development opportunities.

Children and young people are aware of their rights and are confident to act on them.

CREATE is a leader in driving best practice youth participation across government and sector.

CREATE's programs and advocacy are inclusive of children and young people with different abilities and neurodiversity.



OUR MISSION:



CHANGE the systems that impact children and young people, in consultation with them, through advocacy to improve policies, practices and services, and increase community awareness.

OUR GOALS:

Government, sector and community are informed about the issues affecting children and young people with a care experience.

CREATE engages in collective action as a strong ally in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led services and reforms to improve experiences and outcomes for First Nations kids.

CREATE is an active system advocate in all jurisdictions in relation to our advocacy priorities.

Increased presence and influence of CREATE at a national level.

Sector, government and community have confidence in CREATE as a key partner in improving care and protection systems.

Children and young people's voices are elevated in strategic conversations with decision makers to drive positive change in policies and practices that affect their lives.

OUR MISSION:



ORGANISATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY and DEVELOPMENT to ensure a viable and contemporary organisation responsive to the emerging needs of children and young people.

OUR GOALS:

Major progress is made toward reconciliation and culturally safe practice across all areas of CREATE.

Our income is increased and diversified, enabling the expansion of our programs and advocacy to reach more young people.

Participatory processes are embedded at every level so we are able to listen to the voices of young people to continuously improve the way we work at CREATE.

Meet or exceed all financial compliance requirements including external audits and funding acquittals.

CREATE fosters a strong, creative, and collaborative culture that empowers and supports a dedicated, engaged and high-performing team, positioning the organisation as an employer of choice.

Robust policies, processes, and practices are in place to ensure the physical, emotional and cultural safety of children, young people and staff.

A final word

At CREATE, we are right here walking alongside children and young people and striving for communities and systems that do a better job of listening to kids and acting on what they say. We envision a world that elevates children's rights and acknowledges their unique needs, strengths and capacity for personal sovereignty, choice and agency. Thanks to the entire CREATE community for joining us on this journey. And thanks to the young people for showing us all the way.

Leticia Anne Forbes

First Nations Artist

Leticia Anne Forbes is a proud Wiradjuri Torres Strait Islander yinaa 'woman', and Wiradjuri Artist living on the Central Coast, NSW. Leticia established her creative business, Leticia Anne Designs in March 2020 at the age of 23 in Dubbo. Embracing the growth of her business and team, she launched Yirra Miya in February 2023 as her second business under her company Burrellgang Enterprise Pty Ltd. Leticia uses her resilience and leadership qualities, reflecting from her lived experience growing up in the child protection system, to role model to other young entrepreneurs and youth. She represents the power of creating your own path, self-empowerment and following your aspirations. Leticia was a youth worker for six years and was awarded the Indigenous Achievement Award for 7 News Young Achievers in 2022 and later a finalist for the Creative Award and Small Business Award in 2023.



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