



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

Young
People's
Summary
Report

DISCONNECTED, UNPROTECTED:

What happened to the
best interest of the child?

A look at the experiences of
Western Australian children
and young people whilst in
out-of-home care



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgement of children and young people

I acknowledge the challenges faced by children and young people who have had, or may have contact with, the Child Protection system. I acknowledge the continued significant overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care in Western Australia.

Acknowledgement of Country

I proudly acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Custodians of the lands, across Western Australia and acknowledge the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation upon whose lands my office is located. I recognise the continuing connection to culture, land, skies, waters, families and communities of all Aboriginal peoples. Together, my team and I, also pay our respects to Elders, past and present and the to the emerging young leaders. We recognise the knowledge, insights and capabilities of Aboriginal peoples, and pay respect to Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing.

Language

In this report, the term Aboriginal encompasses Western Australia's diverse language groups and also recognises Torres Strait Islanders who live in Western Australia. The use of the term Aboriginal in this way does not imply that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are the same.

Suggested citation

Commissioner for Children and Young People WA (2026), "Disconnected, Unprotected: What happened to the best interest of the child – Young People's/ Youth summary report? Commissioner for Children and Young People, WA.

Definition of children and young people

There are varying definitions for what defines a child or person, including aged-based approaches. The Australian Bureau of Statistics collates data into five-year age categories to align more closely with developmental stages of adolescence.

The United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Children states that 'a child means every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier'. The United Nations defines youth as those aged 15 to 24 years.

For the purposes of this Report, the definition of 'children and young people' is contained within the *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006 (WA)*, which refers to people under 18 years of age as children and young people.

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FROM THE COMMISSIONER

Many children and young people in Western Australia are living in out-of-home care. As part of my role in monitoring the services provided to children and young people, I undertook an Inquiry into 19 young people's experiences in out-of-home care. This Report is about that Inquiry and what we found out.

It is important to remember that many children and young people have had good experiences in out-of-home care, but I think this should be the same for everyone and this Report shows this does not always happen.

What was this report about?

Spending time in out of home care can have a big impact on children and young people, especially those in need of extra care and attention. For this reason, the safety of those in care has been important for each Commissioner for Children and Young People.

We looked at the histories of 19 children and young people who have experienced living in many different homes while in out of home care.



The Commissioner focused on identifying examples of good experiences, areas that need to be better, and made many recommendations to help the government improve the lives of children and young people in out of home care in Western Australia.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Jacqueline McGowan-Jones'.

Dr Jacqueline McGowan-Jones
**Commissioner for Children and
Young People (WA)**

What is 'out-of-home care'?

A child or young person may need protection if they do not have a parent or relative who can look after them safely, or if they are at risk of being harmed.

If a child is placed in out of home care, they are removed from their family and the government becomes responsible for their day-to-day safety, wellbeing, and development.

A SNAPSHOT: 19 WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN OUT OF HOME CARE

Most were...



Female



Non-aboriginal



0-2 years old when entering care

Removed from family because of...



Family Domestic Violence



Emotional Abuse



Neglect

Time in care looked like...



Anywhere between 1.5 years and 18 years



Multiple placements across:

- Foster Care,
- Residential Care,
- Secure Care,
- Respite Care, and
- Self Selected Placements



Multiple admissions to juvenile detention

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Children who entered care early in life often stayed in care throughout childhood.

- Children who entered care before turning two mostly stayed in care until turning 18.
- These children also lived in many different houses. Sometimes with family, though often with unknown families or in places where there are other children and no family.

Children and young people in care speak up but are often unheard.

- Children and young people in care were good at speaking up about their worries, hopes and needs. However, they weren't always listened to and often ended up arranging their own help or making their own opportunities.

Health needs were not always met.

- Important check-ups were missed and some children and young people waited a long time to receive help from doctors and psychologists. When children struggled with grief, loss or anger they were not always helped to talk about their feelings or find better ways of coping.

Difficulties with schooling weren't helped.

- Children or young people who were finding it hard to go to school because of grief, bullying or trouble making new friends after moving weren't supported to help them be involved in education.
- Planning and funding for meaningful educational activities was not common and often children and young people stopped going to school because it did not meet their needs.

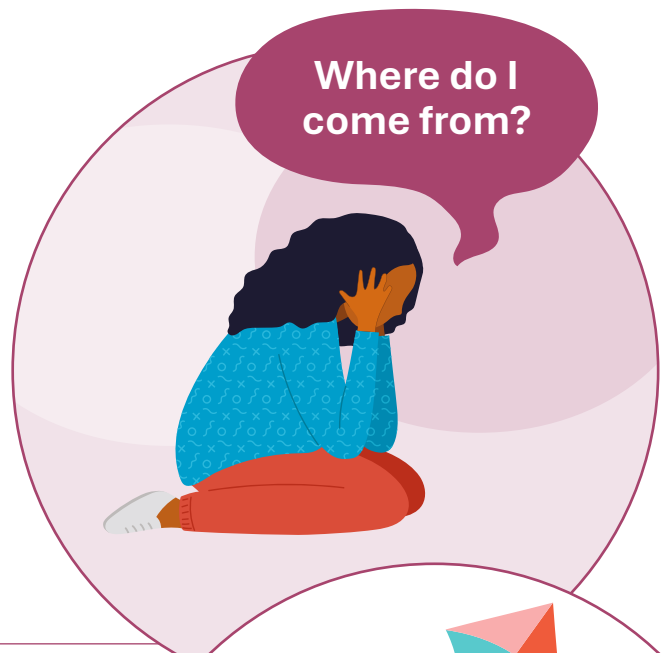


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Children and young people made their own connections with family, friends and culture.

- Support to have regular contact with relatives, culture or community was not always available. Some children and young people had to learn about their family and heritage themselves with no help. These children and young people often felt lost, sad, alone and confused about who they are.



There weren't many opportunities for fun.

- Sport, art, music, dancing, cooking and camping were activities children and young people said they enjoyed though they did not get many opportunities to join clubs or explore their interests.
- Safety and wellbeing were considered more important than having fun.



Young people preparing to leave care were worried about the future.

- As young people prepared to live alone as adults, they were worried about where they would live, how they would manage their money and whether they would make safe decisions. Often, young people did not receive enough help to address these concerns before they left care.



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WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

- We made 56 recommendations to government, asking them to change the way children and young people in out-of-home care are looked after.
- In 2027 there will be a review of the laws about out-of-home care, which will allow for many of these recommendations to be actioned.

NEED HELP UNDERSTANDING THIS REPORT?

You can talk things through with a:

- Parent or carer
- Teacher
- Support worker
- Youth worker

If you found anything in this report upsetting, you can contact the support services below.

For immediate or urgent help, please call 000 for emergency services.

13YARN

If you, or someone you know, are feeling worried or no good, we encourage you to contact 13YARN on 13 92 76 (24/7) and talk with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Crisis Supporter.

Kids Helpline

24/7 free online and phone counselling for children and young people aged 5 to 25.

Telephone: 1800 551 800
www.kidshelpline.com.au

Lifeline

Suicide prevention support by phone or online chat.

Telephone: 13 11 14
www.lifeline.org.au

Mental Health Emergency Response Line

Rapid response to mental health emergencies.

Telephone: 1300 555 788 (Metro)
Telephone: 1800 676 822 (Country)

Contact us at CCYP

We can answer any of your questions or provide large print or alternative formats of this report.



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

Level 1, Albert Facey House
469 Wellington Street
PERTH WA 6000

Telephone: (08) 6213 2297

Freecall: 1800 072 444

Email: info@ccyp.wa.gov.au

Web: ccyp.wa.gov.au

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