



What young people thought about the statutory OOHC Quality Assurance Framework

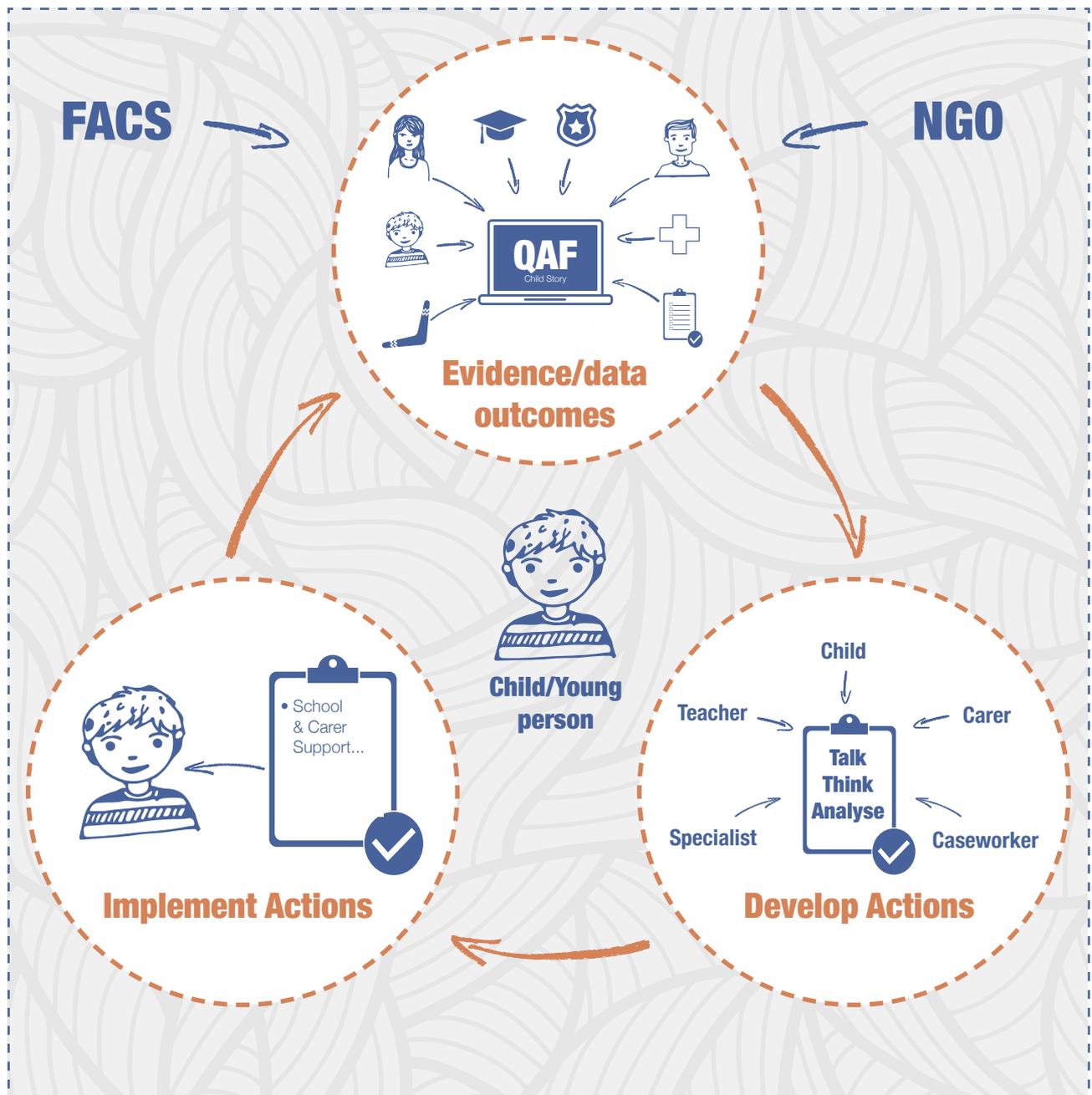
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What is the Quality Assurance Framework?

The Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) has been designed to collect, hold and standardise data from various sources on

the safety, permanency and wellbeing of children in statutory out-of-home care (OOHC) in NSW.

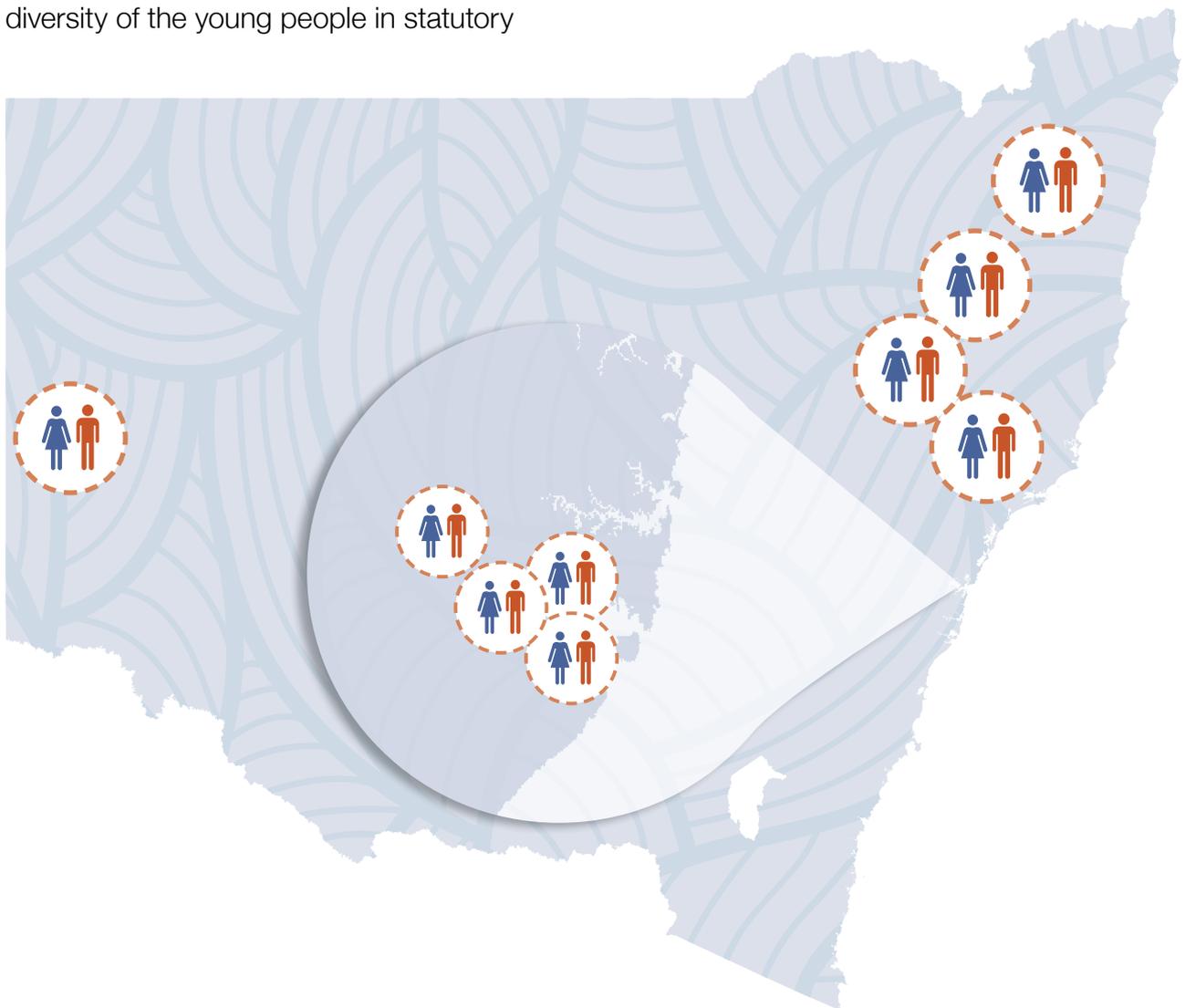


What we did

As part of the QAF design process, we spoke with young people about what safety, permanency, wellbeing, and cultural and spiritual identity meant to them.

We held nine sessions with 32 young people mostly aged between 15 and 22 years old. The young people we spoke to reflect the diversity of the young people in statutory

OOHC. We visited them in metro, urban, rural and remote areas of Ashfield, Armidale, Tamworth, St Mary's, Marrickville, Broken Hill, Wyong, Blacktown and Lismore. They were given afternoon tea and gift vouchers to thank them for their time and valuable insights.

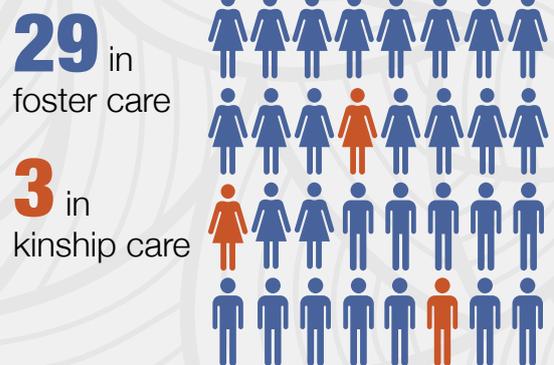
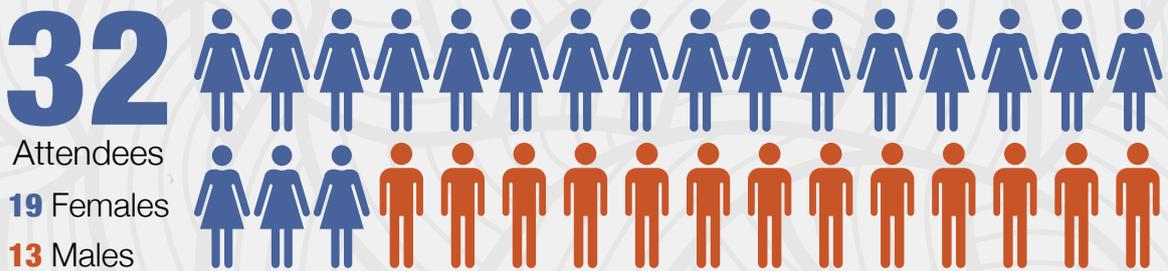


Who we spoke to

We called on agencies such as FACS Community Service Centres, the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (NSW (AbSec), Lismore Northern Rivers Social Development Council and

Settlement Services International to invite young people to participate in the consultations. Sixty-six young people agreed to attend, however only thirty-two were able to make it on the day.

Session Statistics



What did the young people tell us?

Snapshot

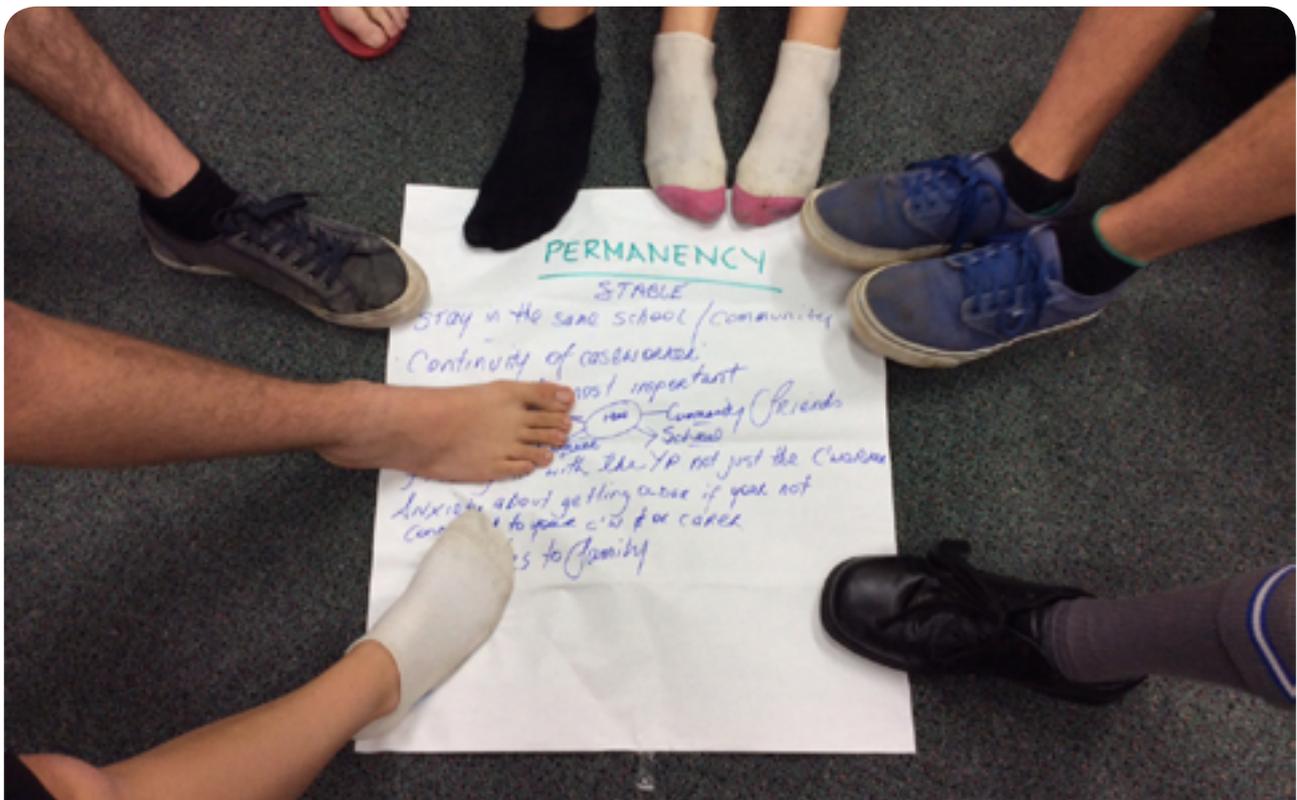
Overall young people said that safety, permanency and wellbeing in care was not just about being in a safe house ‘...but [about] having genuine love and affection [and] good strong relationships.’ In fact, strong relationships with siblings, extended family, community, carers and caseworkers was a strong theme across all domains.

Like all young people, they want to feel connected to their friends and family, have people to talk to that they know and trust, and have opportunities. In order to achieve this, they believe that consistent and loving carers and caseworkers who know them,

like them and care about them are profoundly important.

Maintaining relationships with siblings in different placements was very important to the young peoples’ sense of safety, permanency and wellbeing. Young people consulted in rural and remote areas talked about the challenges associated with this and the sadness felt when siblings are ‘scattered around the state’ or placed in other states.

Consistently across all consultation groups was that young people want to have a voice. Even more importantly they want their voice to be listened to and heard.



What does safety mean you?

For the young people safety was about 'being in an environment where you live without fear of something happening to you.' For them, this was about emotional safety as well as physical safety.

The young people repeatedly said they need to feel like the important people in their life want them, know them and listen to them. They identified trust and confidentiality as important in building relationships that made them feel safe.

Who kids turn to when they feel unsafe

Outside the home environment, schools (teachers and school counsellors) rated highest on the list of places and people the young people could turn to if they felt unsafe. These were followed by caseworkers and police.

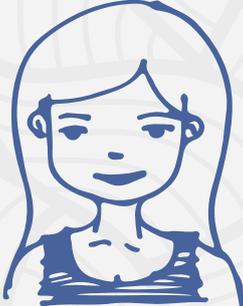


What does permanency mean to you?

For the young people permanency and stability means a 'sense of belonging' supported by quality relationships built over time. It's not just about having 'a bed, a roof, a home', but long-term stable relationships, routines and environments.

Many of the young people talked about having multiple placements and caseworkers in the past and with recent experiences of longer term stability, they feel like they do

'not have to fight the world'. They reflected that when they were moved between placements they often didn't know it was going to happen and lost trust in their carers and caseworkers as a result. The young people also spoke about losing things that were valuable to them when they were moved around, like their computer or mobile phone.



“ My caseworker is a part of my family, I can talk to her as there is a big generational gap with my Nan and Grandad. ”



“ I need carers and caseworkers to support me long term like a parent would. ”

Top 7 things that make young people in statutory OOHQ feel a sense of permanency

1. Being able to stay in your local community.



It is feeling comfortable, knowing where the beach, pool, shops and hangouts are.

2. Staying in the same school.



It is where the teachers know you and you can keep your long-term friends.

3. Stable, long-term placements.



It is 'having one set of carers so you can get to know them and have a routine and build trust and love.'

4. Having the same caseworker so I don't have to keep opening up to new people.



'Getting a new caseworker is a weird feeling, it's awkward and you have to start all over again getting to know them.'

5. Caseworkers who are open and honest about what is going to happen.



It is knowing how long I will be staying in a placement.

6. Being supported to maintain relationships with siblings.



'I feel stressed if I don't know how my siblings are going.'

7. Keeping relationships



'Keeping the relationships with my siblings and grand parents, aunties if it's safe and you want to.'

What does wellbeing mean to you?

For the young people wellbeing means ‘having a sense of control, having a voice, being understood and heard, feeling secure and being in a stress free environment.’ One young person felt that wellbeing ‘...is the first thing FACS should focus on, more than safety and permanency [because] ... how you feel impacts everything.’ Another said FACS need to look at Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.

For some young people, hobbies such as horse riding, sport, dance, running and acting as well as apprenticeships and jobs give them a sense of wellbeing. Being able to maintain these was really important for them. For others, wellbeing was about people not assuming what’s best for them and having carers who ‘consider your point of view and work around your needs, not theirs.’



Who supports our sense of wellbeing?



How they support our sense of wellbeing

“People who understand and put us first”

“People who don’t assume what’s best for us”

“People who see OOHC families come in all shapes and sizes”

“People you can trust”

“People who listen”

What does cultural and spiritual identity mean to you?

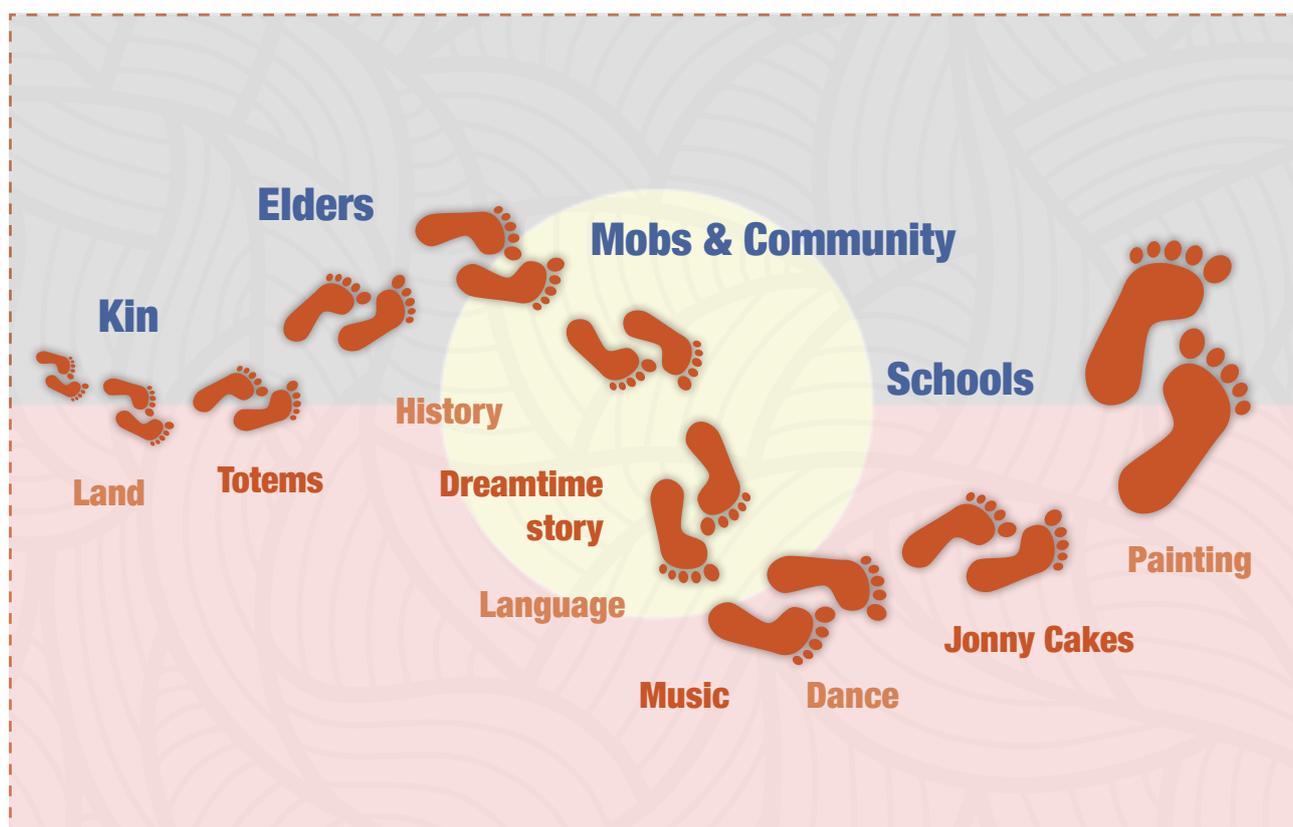
When talking with the Aboriginal young people and those from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds about cultural and spiritual identity, three points stood out:

- The importance of knowing where you come from.
- Having, maintaining and building community and family connections.
- Knowing who to ask about culture.

Many of the Aboriginal young people had strong cultural connections and were able to explain how they gained and maintain these in statutory OOHQ. This group of

young people had aunts and uncles, grandparents and elders as well as local Aboriginal ‘mobs’ who could teach them about their culture.

These Aboriginal young people also talked about being well supported by their schools who partnered with local communities to support cultural activities and celebrate important cultural events. These included things like cultural and leadership programs, establishing Aboriginal Cultural Rooms and having Aboriginal Educational officers (AEO) at school, participating in cultural events, like Sorry Day and NAIDOC week.





One young Aboriginal person discussed how learning about their country and culture gave them a new perspective and respect for the traditions, land and sacred sites of their people. They also talked about the challenges associated with this saying ‘I don’t want to do the cross country because we will be running across sacred land, I want to tell the teacher but I don’t think they will understand.’

The young people, who did not know they were Aboriginal until recently, or who had limited contact with kin, said they did not have connections to their culture or know what country they are from. Most of these young people wanted to know more, but felt it was too difficult. They didn’t know who they could talk to about their culture and didn’t want to ask in case they got it wrong. This group of young people also found it

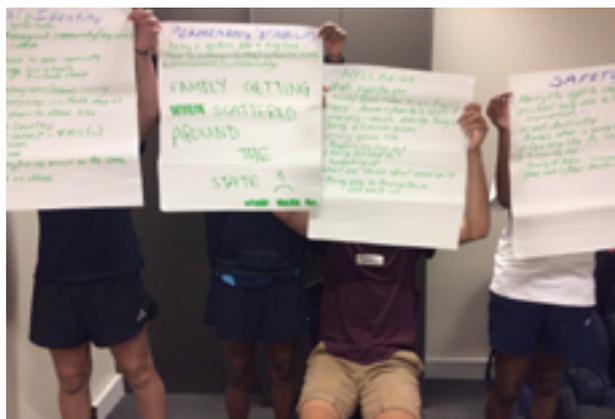
difficult to get proof of Aboriginality documents so they could gain access to services such as housing. One young person said ‘I’m worried about my little brother and two sisters, I didn’t find out about being Aboriginal until last year, they are in non Aboriginal placements and won’t get a chance to learn about their culture. I only have a little bit of knowledge to share with them’.

Others worried that they may be moved from their non Aboriginal carers and said they would be ‘devastated’ if this happened. Another said ‘I wouldn’t mix cultures on purpose, but a good placement is about who you are above cultural identity. Understanding is not limited to spiritual and cultural identity.’

Young people from CALD backgrounds also spoke about the importance of knowing their heritage and knowing who to turn to when they wanted to learn more. One young person spoke about the importance of listening to young people and understanding how they identify rather than making assumptions and placing them where they don’t want to be. In their cultural placement, the young person found it hard to communicate and understand what was being said at home because they didn’t speak their cultural language.

What will we do next?

The valuable information and insights provided by the young people who were consulted will be used to inform a trial of the QAF later this year. The experiences, words and suggestions will underpin the communications plan to assist caseworkers and organisations change the way they work to improve outcomes for children and young people in statutory statutory OOHC.



Thank you

Thank you to all the young people who shared their experiences and insights with us! We feel very privileged to talk with such dynamic and interesting young people.

Thanks to the people who helped especially where it was difficult to engage, on the day or behind the scenes or long-distance travel was involved. Your support has facilitated better connections, especially with Aboriginal young people, which has led to great discussions.

Would you like to know more?

If you took part in the consultation and would like to have a chat about the report, you can email us at QAF@facs.nsw.gov.au and we will get back to you. Otherwise have a chat with your caseworker or support person.

If you would like to know more about the QAF, visit the FACS website: www.facs.nsw.gov.au or email QAF@facs.nsw.gov.au

