

“...Changing placements is hard”⁴⁰

**Stable
out-of-home
care**

“I worry about having to leave”⁴¹

“Try to appoint permanent CSOs. It’s hard to talk freely to strange people”⁴²

⁴⁰ Young person’s view as quoted at page 98 of Child Guardian Views of Children and Young People in Foster Care, Queensland, 2008.

⁴¹ Young person’s view as quoted at page 100 of Child Guardian Views of Children and Young People in Foster Care, Queensland, 2008.

⁴² Young person’s view as quoted at page 97 of Child Guardian Views of Children and Young People in Foster Care, Queensland, 2008.

Stable out-of-home care

Key messages

- The extent of Child Safety Officer contact remains the most frequently raised concern by children and young people in out-of-home care and this may be impacting upon their feelings of stability.
- 81% of children and young people who responded to the *Child Guardian – Views of children and young people in foster care 2008* survey indicated they had less than three placements during their time in care. It is anticipated that, over time, initiatives such as the Department of Child Safety *One Chance at Childhood* initiative will drive improvements in this measure.

Expected outcome for children and young people

Stable out-of-home care is care that will involve minimal placement changes and provide the child with a chance to develop secure attachments. Stability is not simply about staying in the same placement, it is also about continuity in the child's relationships with their community, school and significant support people in their lives, like their Child Safety Officer and Community Visitor.

Significance

A stable placement allows a child to build trusting relationships with key people during their time in out-of-home care, and increases a child's sense of self-worth and belonging.

How the child safety system is working together

The Child Guardian has recently sought the views of young people who have self-placed away from out-of-home care as to their experiences of the child safety system. These insights are critical to properly informing the service response to this at-risk group of young people. The Child Guardian and the Department of Child Safety are working together to improve each agency's capacity to gather and share information about young people who self-place. This will enable both the Department and the Child Guardian to monitor and take appropriate action in response to issues and trends concerning self-placements, in an ongoing and proactive way.

Key findings in 2007–08

Placement stability

The Child Guardian Survey 2008⁴³ found that 81% of children and young people in foster care had three or less placements during their time in out-of-home care and 14% of children and young people in foster care had four to six placements during their time in out-of-home care.

Performance data from the Department of Child Safety for 2007–08 also indicated that:

- 83.2% of the children and young people that exited care during 2007–08 had three or less placements during their time in care, and
- 66 (4.3%) children and young people who exited care in 2007–08 had seven or more placements during their time in care.⁴⁴

Children and young people who self-place

Self-placing is when a young person leaves their Department of Child Safety placement to live somewhere else, without the approval of the Department of Child Safety.

Sixteen per cent of Community Visitor Serious Issues in 2007–08⁴⁵ concerned children and young people who self-placed. This included 139 discrete young people aged 12 to 17 years old. Of these young people, approximately:

- half were female, half were male, and
- one quarter were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or culturally and linguistically diverse

Many of these children self-placed to a family member, friend or boyfriend or girlfriend's residence. The reasons why children self-place are discussed in the following chapter, Individual Needs Met.

43 A total of 1861 children and young people (from foster and residential care) responded to the Child Guardian's survey, administered in early 2008. The survey findings do not necessarily represent the views of all children and young people in out-of-home care.

44 Unpublished data, Department of Child Safety, 2008.

45 Explanation of Serious Issue Forms and how this data was derived is provided in Appendix C of this report.

Children and young people's relationship with their Child Safety Officer

The Child Guardian Survey 2008 found that 22% of young people and 37% of children in foster care reported not knowing the name of their Child Safety Officer.⁴⁶

Eleven percent of young people in residential care reported not knowing the name of their Child Safety Officer. In addition, 70% of young people in residential care reported having more than one Child Safety Officer in the last year⁴⁷ and made the following comments about a lack of stability in their relationships with residential workers:

- *'I hate people coming and going'*
- *'Too many people in my life',* and
- *'When you go out to a meeting, the other worker doesn't know what was spoken about'.*

Community Visitor Serious Issues for 2007–08 also identified 209 children and young people whose lack of contact with their Child Safety Officer was causing a significant impact.⁴⁸

The issue of insufficient Child Safety Officer contact was also the most frequently raised service delivery issue in 2007–08 that Community Visitors were required to address locally. This has been the case for the past three years, indicating it remains a major concern for children and young people.

The Department of Child Safety is of the view that Child Safety Officer contact is not a reliable indicator of child safety system performance, highlighting there is no research or evidence base that suggests that a lack of Child Safety Officer contact negatively impacts on outcomes experienced by children and young people.

Instead, the Department of Child Safety considers that it is the child's other meaningful, trustworthy and stable relationships in their lives that take precedence over a child's relationship with their Child Safety Officer.⁴⁹

The Child Guardian will continue to gather and report on data about the level of contact and quality of relationships between Child Safety Officers and children and young people, where there is evidence (particularly evidence directly from children and young people) that these matters impact either positively or negatively on the outcomes experienced.

⁴⁶ At page 29 of the Child Guardian Views of Children and Young People in Foster Care, Queensland, 2008 and page 31 of the Child Guardian Views of Children and Young People in Residential Care, Queensland, 2008

⁴⁷ Children and young people in foster care were not asked this question.

⁴⁸ Meaning it was deemed serious enough to be the subject of a Serious Issue Form.

⁴⁹ Correspondence received from the Department of Child Safety, dated 30 January 2009.

2007–08 Child Guardian activities about stability

Self-placement Review

The Child Guardian has recently completed a review of at-risk young people who self-place from out-of-home care, which explores their views of the last approved placement prior to self-placing, reasons for self-placing, and what happened after they self-placed. These findings are discussed in this chapter and 'Individual Needs Met'.

High-risk adolescent (HRA) workgroup

The Child Guardian has participated in the HRA Workgroup of the Child Protection Partnership Forum and has contributed the findings of the self-placement review as a means of advancing the views of young people into the discussions and planning in this challenging area of service delivery.

Child Guardian Stamp of Approval



The Department of Child Safety will continue to roll out the *One Chance at Childhood* initiative, with a focus on employing more specialist support to enhance the safety and stability of babies and toddlers placed in out-of-home care in the child safety system.

Strategic action areas for 2008–09

The extent of Child Safety Officer contact remains the most frequently raised concern by children and young people in out-of-home care. The Child Guardian will continue to gather data about the level of contact and quality of relationships between Child Safety Officers and children and young people, and examine whether these matters impact either positively or negatively on the outcomes experienced.

The Child Guardian will complete its audit of a number of mandatory and essential services next year, including the extent to which children and young people are involved in placement decisions (as required by the *Child Protection Act 1999*) and whether appropriate information and support are provided to carers. The Child Guardian will make findings and recommendations to the Department of Communities where scope exists for improvements in these areas and report on the outcomes in next year's Child Guardian Report.