

MAY 2025

I Became My Own Carer

Residential Care Expert Advisory Council

CABOOLTURE WORKSHOP

REPORT



Queensland
Family & Child
Commission



Queensland
Government

Workshop Overview

Young people are the experts of their own lives

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) has partnered with Life Without Barriers (LWB) to conduct a series of Residential Care Expert Advisory Council workshops. The Council was established to enable direct consultation with young people living in residential care.

Almost two years on from the commencement of Child Safety's review of the residential care system, the issues raised by young people continue to echo the findings in our oversight reporting: the system needs bold reform; children and young people must have greater involvement in decisions that affect them; and transitioning to adulthood should be an ongoing learning process, not a single event.

In May 2025, 16 young people with living and lived experience of Queensland's residential care system participated in the Caboolture-based workshop.

They expressed hope that conversations like these will continue, driving reform grounded in their lived experiences. The members were invited to explore a range of topics, including:

- residential care and other support staff
- being heard
- living skills
- education and employment
- housing
- mental and physical health support inadequacy
- community and culture.

It is clear there is no single or quick fix to the system. Young people living in residential care are calling for change, not just for themselves, but for their younger siblings, friends, peers and for all children who will enter the child protection system in the future. A whole-of-government system reform is needed, one that embeds these perspectives to deliver impactful and lasting change, and strengthens the care, safety and love that all young people deserve.

CABOOLTURE WORKSHOP MAY 2025



What we heard from the young people

The group participated in a collaborative workshop session to share experiences and develop ideas for positive change. They were asked to reflect on what works, and what doesn't. Principal Commissioner Luke Twyford and key Commission staff attended the afternoon session, where participants shared their stories, insights on the current system, and visions for change to improve the future.

Several members spoke about their current study commitments and aspirations to become youth or support workers. Many shared that their motivation stemmed from a desire to make a positive difference for children and young people in care, offering the kind of support they wished they had received.

The workshop generated many insightful, thought-provoking, and powerful messages. These contributions not only revealed significant systemic issues and opportunities but also highlighted practical ideas for immediate change to improve experiences now and into the future. An individual submission has been included in this report as a case study, reflecting the group's commitment to sharing lived experience as a catalyst for improvement.

Members expressed strong support for the workshop format. They valued the opportunity to speak openly, call attention to systemic failures, and connect with like-minded individuals who shared similar experiences. Participants called for more regular workshops to continue this important work.

What's working in residential care

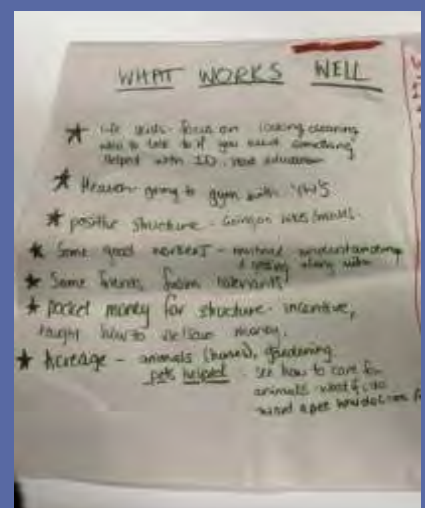
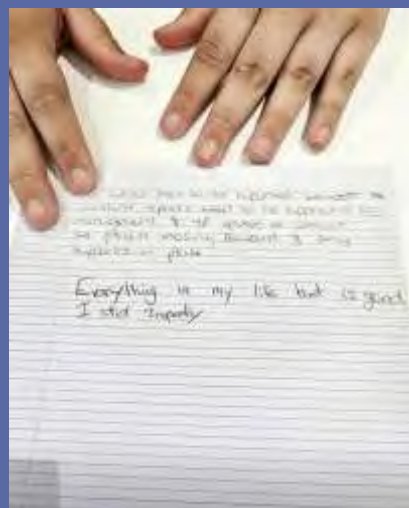
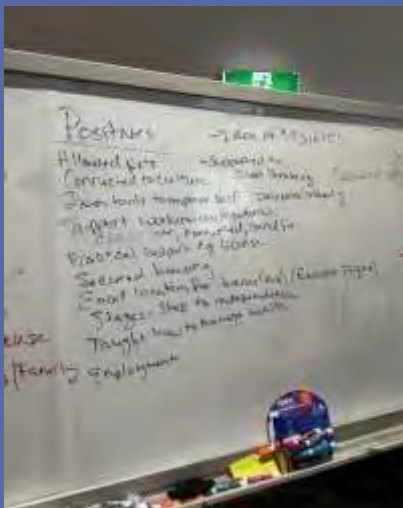
Positive practices experienced by young people and raised during the workshop included: receiving reminders to attend important appointments; access to practical support; the provision of appropriate, good-quality housing supplies; placement with an Indigenous provider to better meet specific needs; and the removal of financial burdens for basic necessities such as accommodation and food.

These positive experiences were often the result of proactive and compassionate responses from individual youth and residential care workers but were described as infrequent.

One member's reflection captured the overall sentiment about where young people in residential care tend to experience positive practices:

“I want to be the advocate that I didn't have growing up.”

“Everything in my life that is good, I did independently.”

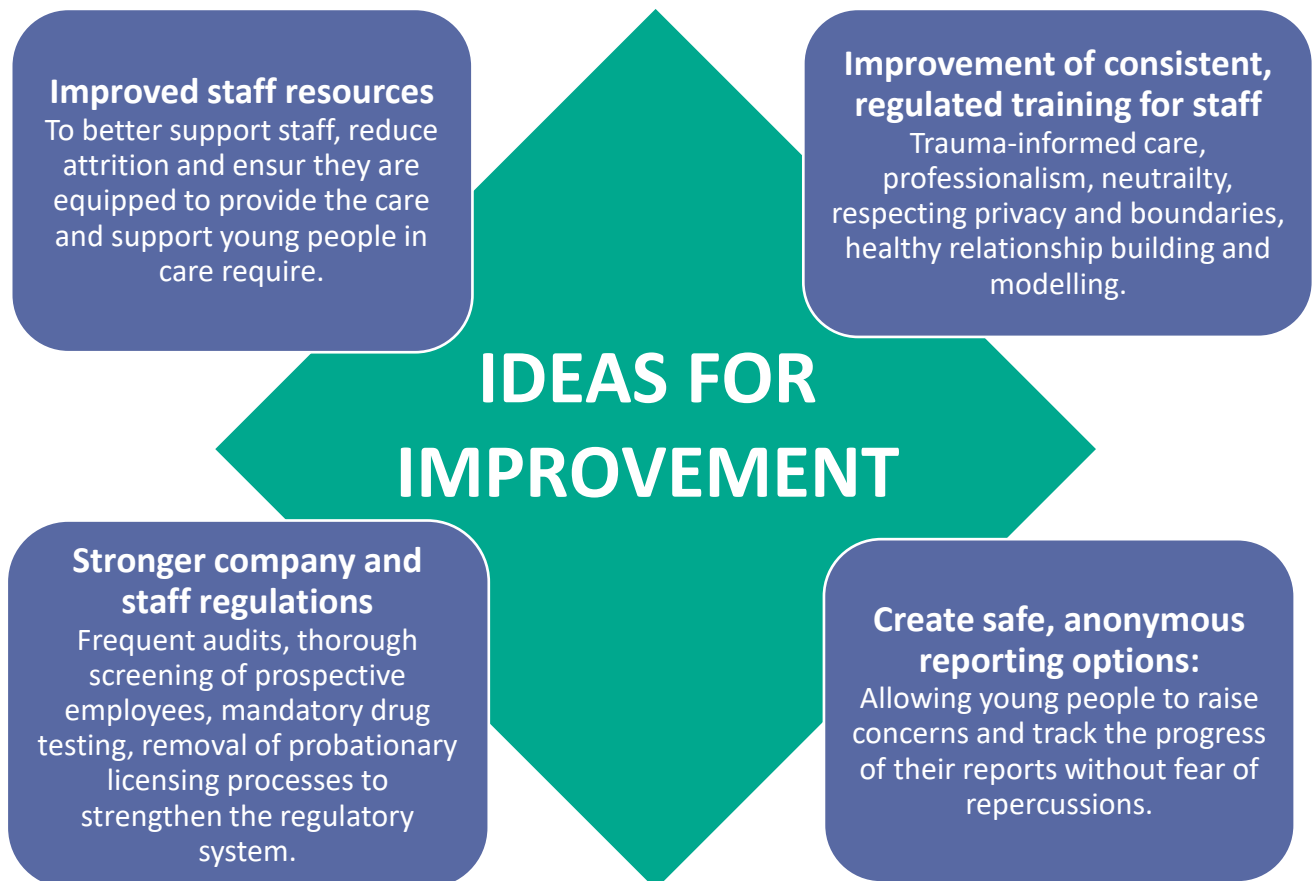


What needs to change

The workshop sparked broad and insightful discussions, exploring key aspects of life both within the residential care system and beyond. Members shared thoughtful reflections and offered practical advice for immediate and long-term change. Central to many of these conversations was the importance of genuine engagement in decision-making processes and the need for systems and professionals to meaningfully consider each young person's unique perspective, voice and goals. Members emphasised that decisions made without their input often fail to reflect their needs and aspirations, reinforcing the call for a more inclusive and respectful approach to care planning and service delivery.

Key topics for discussion were:

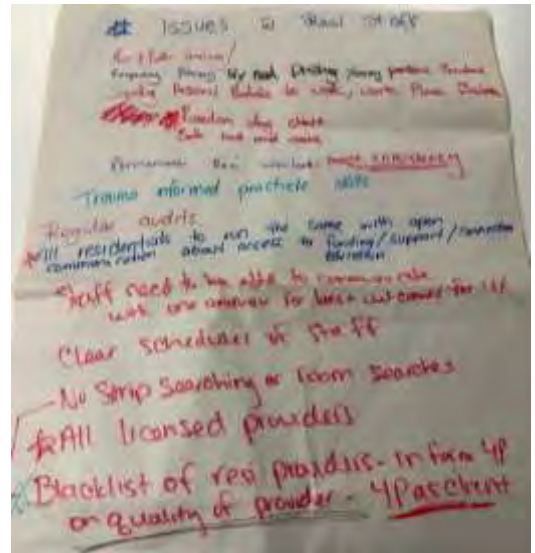
- residential care and other support staff
- being heard
- living skills
- education and employment
- housing
- mental and physical health support inadequacy
- community and culture.



Residential care and other support staff

Many members shared distressing experiences with residential care workers, describing a lack of support, communication, safety, and respect, as well as feeling unable to speak up when things went wrong.

A commonly raised issue was the lack of awareness among members about available support services and their rights at home, school, and work. Many reported being left out of important decisions or discussions involving Child Safety Officers, care workers, or other support staff. This was often heightened by high staff turnover, which created confusion and assumptions that someone else had already provided the necessary information, resulting in critical details never reaching the young people.



Being heard

Members shared accounts of verbal abuse that silenced them when they tried to speak up. They spoke of harmful stereotypes, tokenistic consultations that led to no action, and repeated breaches of confidentiality, all adding to eroded confidence in the system and representatives, and discouraging them from speaking up for themselves.

“

It's like the ones making the decisions are the ones who are least likely to want to spend time with young people.

If they're telling me about other kids, what are they telling other kids about me?

I've been told 'you're not smart enough so why bother', and 'you're going to be a junkie just like your mother'.

”

Concerns were also raised about long delays and complex processes when seeking support, with speaking up often leading to inaction, red tape, and unnecessarily long wait times. Members emphasised the importance of having someone “on their side” to empower them and advocate for their perspectives. It was suggested that anyone involved in decision-making for a young person should adopt this role of empowerment and advocacy, not only for the individual, but on behalf of all children and young people in care.

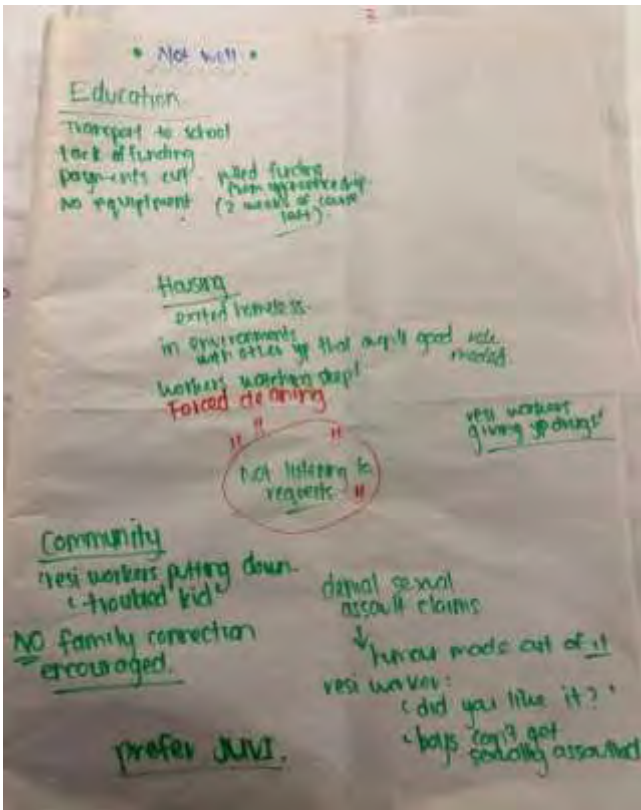
How to listen and act

- Respect the young person's story; reflect and empower.
- Meet consultation with genuine action
- Involve young people in all matters and decisions impacting them.

“

I don't know about next steps. I don't know what support services are available out there.

”



Education and employment

Members consistently expressed a strong desire to engage in education, but said that Child Safety Officers and youth or support workers were often the greatest barriers. Even when enrolled in school, many young people struggled to access basic resources such as school supplies or transport. Some shared stories of taking the initiative to enrol themselves in school or extracurricular activities, only to be blocked because a Child Safety Officer had not signed the required paperwork. Others were denied access to mainstream education altogether due to vague ‘safety concerns,’ further isolating them from their communities and peers.

“ Two weeks before I was set to graduate as a sparkie, I had my funding cut and I don’t know why. I wasn’t able to graduate. ”

When asked about part-time work, most members said they were willing and eager to work but had received little to no support in accessing job opportunities, learning how to apply, or balancing work with other responsibilities. More than just missed opportunities, these stories reflect a system that undermines young people’s potential, rather than nurturing and uplifting it.

Living skills

Members spoke about the urgent need for practical life skills to support a stable transition out of residential care. They shared that this support is often optional, inconsistently delivered, or avoided by workers exploiting system loopholes, leaving them feeling unprepared, dismissed and misunderstood.

They also described the use of confusing and overly complex language by workers, which often led to frustration, discouragement, and disengagement. This disengagement is then documented, reinforcing the inaccurate perception that young people are not interested in learning to live independently, when the opposite is true. Participants in the workshop expressed a strong interest in learning more about:

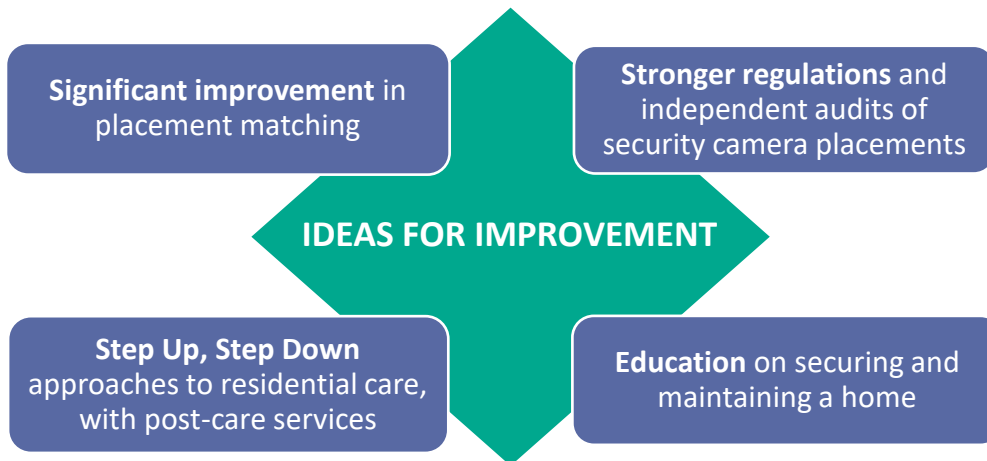
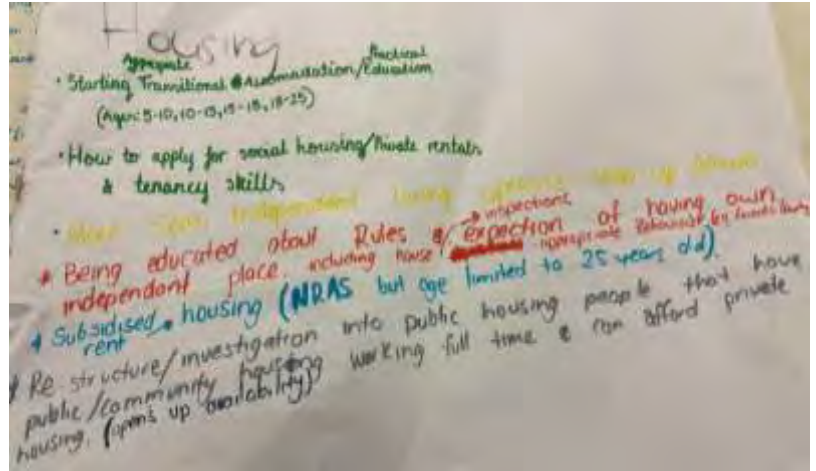
Budgeting, bills and taxes	Shopping lists	Consumer and workers’ rights	Car ownership, independent housing	Rental history and other requirements
Shopping lists and meal preparation	Meal preparation	Workplace health and safety	Building healthy relationships	Social and community engagement

“Once you’re out, you can’t come back.”

Housing

Housing was one of the most urgent concerns raised by members, by children who are currently living in residential care and those who have transitioning out. Many spoke about feeling unsafe, exposed, and unprotected in residential care environments, with constant worries about their security, privacy, and personal belongings.

For those preparing to leave care, fears of homelessness, disconnection, and isolation were common. Many felt unprepared and unsupported in the transition, unsure of how to secure safe housing, navigate tenancy systems, or access the resources they needed.



Community and culture

Although community and culture were not specific topics of the workshop, it became evident that they are critical to improving life in the residential care system. Members shared the profound impact that disconnection from culture and community has had on their lives, influencing all areas discussed during the workshop.

“ They might think it will make us sad to be exposed to that kind of stuff, but I know those families exist – even if I can’t see it. I think it’s better to see what a healthy relationship looks like. ”

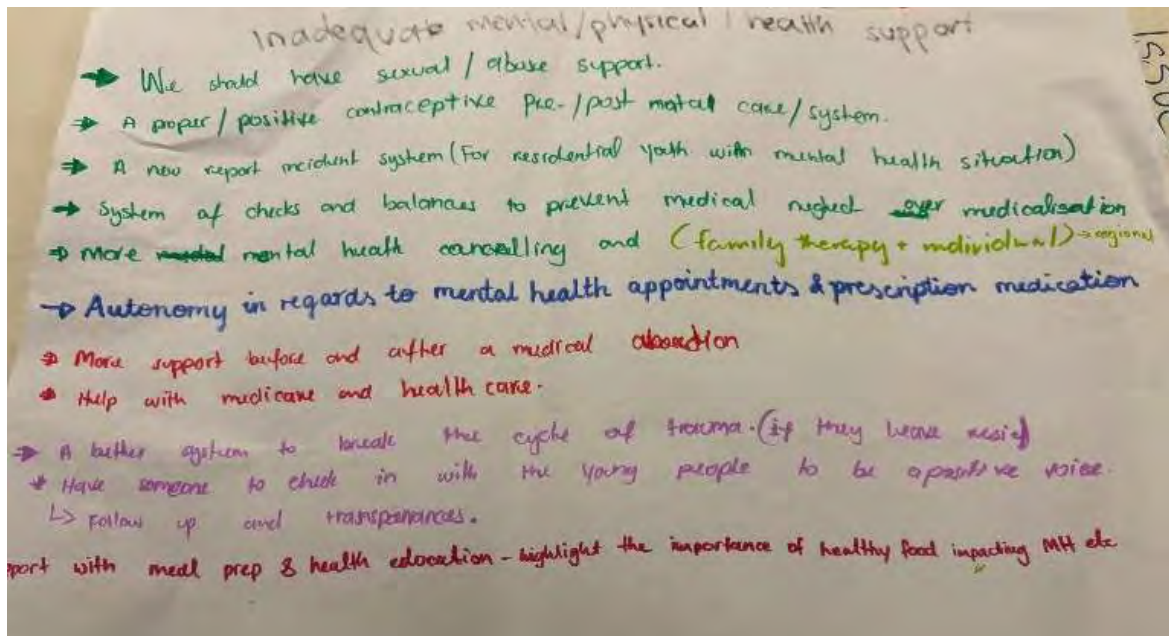
They spoke about the barriers they face, such as red tape around social activities, being removed from familiar support networks, the burden of proving their aboriginal identity, and the lack of opportunities to connect positively with peers in care. They also highlighted the importance of engaging with young people outside the care system to witness healthy relationships and family dynamics.

Inadequate mental and physical health care

Members made it clear that the current mental and physical health services and support provided within residential care are not meeting their needs, and significant reform is urgently required. They raised concerns about the lack of support in navigating the healthcare system, and the importance of preventative education, calling for better guidance on how to make healthy lifestyle choices.

Members also called for better awareness and care by support workers, as many young people have experienced medical (physical and mental) neglect during their time in residential care.

Timely access to specialised support	Mental health services	Healthcare system understanding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Counselling •Crisis intervention •Sexual and reproductive healthcare (particularly contraception, pre- and post-natal support, and education around bodily autonomy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Consistent access to qualified mental health professionals •Family therapy •Greater autonomy in booking and attending mental health appointments •Have a say in decisions around prescription medications •Regional accessibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •How to use Medicare •Eligibility of services •How to advocate for themselves in a medical setting



Final thoughts

The attending members of the Caboolture Residential Care Expert Advisory Council workshop were clear, courageous, and consistent. Across every theme—education, employment, housing, health, staff, living skills, community, and culture—they described a system that too often disempowers, excludes, and fails to prepare young people for life beyond care. What they shared were not isolated incidents, but systemic patterns of neglect, silencing, and unmet needs.

Young people in residential care are calling for more than service improvements—they are demanding a fundamental shift in how the care system sees and supports them. They want to be equipped with real-world skills, supported in achieving their goals, included in decisions, and treated with dignity. They want care that offers a real childhood, fosters meaningful connections, and prepares them for adulthood.

We heard from young people who are actively working towards becoming qualified youth support workers. Inspired by their own experiences in care—both positive and negative—they want to support others in the way they wish they had been supported. Their goal is to use their lived experience to help create safer, more understanding environments for future generations, proving that, with the right guidance, young people in care can become powerful agents of change.

Issues mapping and problem-solving discussions with the Principal Commissioner

NM - Res. care feedback
 issue: staff may have academic training but lack physical understanding of YP & their behavioural issues.
 solution: longer period of time in placement hours.
 Increased or longer shadow shifts with longer term employees.
 issue: fundamental issue when putting a group of YP in a house with conflicting personality & beliefs (I think a place like res. care needs to be more structured. A lot of YP have come from families who do not have structure & as a program trying to better our next generation we need to think more logically & realistically of best ways to help.
 solution: Build structure based on current clients in res. as well as be open to feedback (ie suggestion boxes)

issues: Res workers need to be clear about their limitations when it comes to them individually & policy & procedures.
 solutions: they need to have structured outlines on what is correct as well as a mutual understanding of the limitations and solutions to limitations
 - more 1 on 1 clear / worker interaction
 - check understanding & ask for feedback.
 issue: workers and young people need to understand policy & procedures that first hand impact them (mandatory reporting)
 solution: There needs to be a structured set of guidelines & step by step instructions on what & how to report incidents. Need to have a better understanding on how to identify critical information & staff need more regular & updated training on what critical information that

