Aim	Method	Findings and recommendations	NCPC comment
To provide children and young people with a voice about their experiences in out-of-home care.	Children and young people in foster care in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) aged between 9–17 years ($n = 18$) were recruited (8 males, 10 females). Children were accessed from all four care providing agencies in the ACT. The CREATE consultancy conducted all surveys and recorded all interviews on audiotape for transcription. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted. The survey tool was developed by CREATE and the Office of the Community Advocate (OCA) based on past research by CREATE and a New South Wales Community Services Commission report (2000). Questions related to support, entry into care, care experiences, relationships, education, future ambitions, right to complain, participation and decision-making, and improving the care system. Marymead, Barnardos Galilee and Richmond Fellowship all identified additional participants to take part in the project; however, they came too late for surveys to be completed to meet the report deadline. However, all children who were approached to be included in the study agreed to participate.	The amount of time children and young people had been in care ranged from 6 months to 15 years and the number of placements they had had during their time in care ranged from 1 to more than 20 placements. The time in their current placement ranged from 3 days to 10 years. The children and young people were residing in a variety of living situations, including foster care, residential care, independent living, kinship care and detention. The report identified many positive experiences that children and young people had had in out-of-home care in the ACT. Factors that contributed to the positive experience included: • supportive and positive foster carers, residential care workers and caseworkers; • opportunities to have fun and build relationships with these people; • support with birth family contact under the terms and circumstances desired by the children and young people themselves; • opportunities and support to be involved in decision-making; • educational support; • support for permanency planning; • access to opportunities that otherwise they would not have had; and • intensive and individual support from non-government agencies. However, there was a group of children and young people who had negative care experiences and had experienced further systemic abuse. Factors in the system that have appeared to contribute to this include: • cumbersome systemic procedures preventing timely and adequate response, which disempower workers in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities; • court processes that do not adequately consult with children and young people or support long-term orders and permanency planning; • lack of resources and support for carers and caseworkers to ensure that they can stay in their positions doing their invaluable work; • deficiencies in carer and caseworker training in areas such as facilitating the participation of children and young people in decision-making and relationship-building; • inadequate early intervention strategies to support families to stay together and prevent entry into care; • inadequate entry into care support and provision of information to children and young people; and • inadequate support and preparation for young people preparing to leave care, and post-care support.	The report is very comprehensive and covers a variety of important areas and issues for foster children. It makes important recommendations. The report would be an excellent resource for caseworkers, as many children identified positive and negative aspects of caseworkers' involvement in their lives, and made suggestions on things they should continue doing or stop doing. The report documents all responses to all questions by all children and young people, providing the reader with an opportunity for some insight into their lives. The report provided very rich information; however, the small sample and qualitative design limits the degree to which the study findings can be generalised.

New South Wales Community Services Commission. (2000). *Voices of children and young people in foster care*. Sydney: Author.

Aim	Method	Findings and recommendations	NCPC comment
The aim of the report was to provide a forum for Indigenous children and young people to comment on their understanding of the care process, their care experiences and their connections to their families and culture.	The Western Australian Department of Community Development (DCD) commissioned the CREATE Foundation to undertake a qualitative interview process with a random selection of 13 of the 50 children and young people in care included in the audit of case files of Indigenous children in the care of the department (WA Department for Community Development 2004). Interviews were conducted by the CREATE project team in partnership with indigenous staff from the department.	The report extensively documented participants' responses, providing aggregate data and illustrative quotes for each item. However, there appeared to be limited synthesis of data; the total discussion in relation to themes emerging from the data read: "common themes around access to information; placement with kin; sibling placements; regular contact with birth parents and relatives; and cultural needs were apparent" (p. 26). Notable recommendations included the need for training of caseworkers, carers and residential workers about the value of connecting Indigenous children and young people to their culture. Furthermore, it was recommended that, where appropriate, Indigenous children and young people be provided with culturally appropriate counselling to help them deal with the trauma of being apprehended and continually separated from their birth parents and family. It was not always clear how the results from the children's interviews informed the recommendations that arose from the research. For example, recommendations 1 and 18, which related to policy issues (that is, the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle and financial support for kinship carers), were not reported in children's responses. Nevertheless, the report did offer some important recommendations in relation to the importance of caseworkers, carers and residential workers recognising the value of children's and young people's views. Notably, it was recommended that caseworkers, carers and residential workers receive training in engaging Indigenous children and young people, in order to better understand and respond to their particular requirements.	A stated limitation of the report was that some DCD metropolitan officers' resistance to allowing the project group to speak with the children and young people negatively affected the project. This finding echoes similar problems encountered by researchers trying to access children and young people in South Australia. The problems encountered by the researchers are concerning, as it goes against a key tenet of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that states that children's views should be taken into account in any decision that is likely to affect their wellbeing or position in life.

Western Australia Department for Community Development. (2004). *Indigenous Wards in Care Project*. Perth: Author.

Aim	Method	Findings and recommendations	NCPC comment
To assess children's satisfaction with their current placement experiences in the South Australian alternative care system.	*Study 1: Recent placements* The first study examined satisfaction of a subset of children (*n* = 51) recently placed into care in 1998–1999 and currently being tracked as part of an ongoing longitudinal study (23 females, 28 males). Children were selected if they were aged 4 years or older, and were referred for emergency, short- and long-term placements over a 12-month period. The study included children placed into residential/group, foster and relative care in which the placement was supported by funding from Family and Youth Services (FAYS). Mean age = 11.68 years (*SD* = 2.82). 12 children were in residential care and 39 were in foster care. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted. The sample was also compared with other children placed in care using the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), social adjustment, parenting checklist, and measures of child satisfaction (measure derived from Stuntzner-Gibson et al., 1995). A normative measure of the quality of parental care was included as a separate validity check of satisfaction scores. *Study 2: Long-term placements* The second study assessed the level of satisfaction of children (*n* = 48) who had been in stable, long-term placements (23 females, 25 males). Mean age = 13.1 years (*SD* = 2.40). Mean length of time in care = 5.1 years (*SD* = 4.65). Children were interviewed while still in care, and caseworkers were also interviewed.	Over 80% of children reported being satisfied with both their caseworker and their placement, although children in residential (group) care reported being less satisfied than their counterparts in foster care (this finding is consistent with research in the US). Foster homes were generally considered secure, happy and supportive. Caseworkers were also considered to be helpful, caring and willing to listen. Similar findings emerged for the two groups; length of time in care did not appear to make a difference to the results.	The strength of the study is that the authors checked for the representativeness of sample. Comparisons of background characteristics suggested that the samples interviewed were highly representative of the population of children referred for placements during the study period. Normative measures of parental care were used as a separate validity check. A few children who were randomly selected were not included due to severe behavioural problems and/or disabilities. The authors suggest it is possible that only the more successful and satisfied carers may have agreed to participate.

Stuntzner-Gibson, D., Koren, P. E., & DeChillo, N. (1995). The youth satisfaction questionnaire: What kids think of services. *Families in Society, 76*, pp. 614–624.

Aim	Method	Findings and recommendations	NCPC comment
The aim of the study was to examine the perceptions of family of children in foster care and adults who were in care as children.	The first part of the study was a qualitative study of the perceptions of family of 43 (22 males, 21 females) children who were in long-term foster care. Part 2 of the study was a retrospective study of 39 adults (11 males, 28 females) who had been in foster care as children. The study examined their recollections of their perceptions of family in their childhood. All participants completed a modified version of the Kvebaek Family Sculpture Technique (KFST). The KFST represents family relationships in terms of perceived emotional distance. The adults also provided their representations of childhood, current and ideal families in an in-depth interview.	Gardner noted the complexity of relationships for children and that there is a need for options to be kept open to enable foster children to maximise opportunities for connection with either foster or biological family. The analyses showed that both the children and the adults referred to their foster family as "family", while maintaining some links with their biological family. These relationships were found to be independent of variables such as age at first placement or length of time in care. An interesting finding was the children's capacity to form relationships whenever suitable opportunities were available.	The study provides important information on how both children and adults who have spent time in care perceive family. The data provides insight into the impact of different placements and relationships in care on children and adults and the different notions of family that different individuals have.

Source: Gardner, H. (2004). Perceptions of family: Complexities introduced by foster care. Part 2: Adulthood perspectives. *Journal of Family Studies,* *10*, 188–203.

Aim	Method	Findings and recommendations	NCPC comment
The aim of the study was to build on research into child-related perceptions of family when adults spent time in care as children.	A quasi-longitudinal study that compares 39 adults' retrospective childhood representations of family with representations they have constructed in their adult family. All participants completed a modified version of the Kvebaek Family Sculpture Technique (KFST). The KFST represents family relationships in terms of perceived emotional distance. The adults also provided their representation of childhood, current and ideal families in an in-depth interview.	The findings demonstrated many similarities between childhood and adult representations of family and showed that some participants established and re-established relationships (with biological parents, siblings and selected foster parents) later in life. Gardner recommended that options remain open to provide opportunities to ensure relationships thrive.	The retrospective design of the study has limitations, but the agreement between the KFST and interview findings do add weight to the data sets. The study builds on the limited amount of research conducted in this area and supports policies that aim to keep options open for children in foster care.

Aim	Method	Findings and recommendations	NCPC comment
To analyse issues in the recruitment as research participants of young people in care with disrupted placement histories for three studies on placement instability under the jurisdiction of the South Australian statutory authority.	Analysis of three South Australian studies. *Study 1*: A qualitative study of young people in stable placements for at least 8 months after a period of placement instability (*n* = 11). *Study 2*: A series of single-subject studies monitoring disruptive children in standard foster care. *Study 3*: A qualitative study of children's perspectives of a recent placement breakdown.	Non-response rates of between 72.5% and 82% are reported. Large numbers of young people were excluded because agency social workers did not cooperate with the project, and more were excluded for reasons that suggest high levels of distress in this population. The problem of providing a voice to distressed subjects when they are excluded from research is presented. The authors suggested the appointment of an independent representative for children in care to review research proposals and to negotiate research access to children. In Study 1, social workers vetoed participation for 9 of the 11 young people (a non-response rate of 82%), which forced the abandonment of the study. In Studies 2 and 3, of 124 referrals for new placements, 33 were excluded because they did not meet all criteria, which left 91 young people eligible for one or both studies. A total of 25 were recruited to one or both studies, with a combined non-response rate of 72.5%. This resulted in reduced sample sizes and a high probability of sample bias.	There has been increasing recognition in recent years that alternative care research should include the perspectives of young people in foster care. The small sample in this study reduces the ability of the study findings to be generalised. However, the paper raises very interesting points about the problems that are encountered, especially in relation to the recruitment of young people in care and the impact on the validity of out-of-home care research.

Aim	Method	Findings and recommendations	NCPC comment
1. To obtain carers' perspectives on the process of placement deterioration and placement breakdown. 2. To determine the level of formal support provided when a placement begins to falter. 3. To identify any interventions that were not provided but that might have made the placement sustainable.	The research was conducted in South Australia based on a qualitative, semi-structured interview schedule with 19 carers who ended placement due to the young person's disruptive behaviour. Placement duration: mean = 15.4 months (range: 0.5–120 months). Relative carers (*n* = 2) and non-relative carers (*n* = 17) had 10.5 years experience on average (range: 8 months – 38 years). Mean age of child/young person = 14.2 years (range: 10–17 years). Carers were non-Indigenous Australians (*n* = 16), Indigenous Australians (*n* = 2), and from European heritage (*n* = 1). Referrals for new placements between August 2000 and April 2001 were examined. Inclusion criteria: that the child/young person who was the subject of a referral was aged 10 or above, and that the young person's last placement was ended by the carer on the grounds of difficult behaviour. Interviews with carers were conducted face-to-face or via telephone.	Carers perceived the placement as potentially sustainable ("S") (*n* = 9) or unsustainable ("U") (*n* = 10). Pre-placement preparation was seen as inadequate by 14 of the 19 carers. Requests and provision of help: "U" respondents asked agency for help, receiving only phone assistance or child mentor visit. Of "S" respondents, 6 approached statutory agency, and 2 had high praise. Others received no help or increased visits from social worker. Reasons for ending placement: "U" solely on the grounds of safety (*n* = 7), verbal abuse (*n* = 2), and refusal to comply with age-appropriate restrictions (*n* = 1). Interventions that may have saved placement: 6 possible interventions were discussed with carers. 7 "S" respondents indicated 1–2 interventions having potential to save the placement, including: carer respite, immediate crisis care, child mentor, child counselling, and information and education about managing an adolescent. Five "U" respondents gave negative responses to all questions. Carers' affective response to breakdown: responses were varied and ranged from disappointment through to relief. Outcomes for children: Of the 16 young people involved in the placements examined, 1 moved to independent living, 1 moved to live with parents of a friend, 3 were reunified with family and 11 remained in care (2 institutional, 9 foster care). Research suggested: If carers are adequately informed, prepared, supported and consulted, it may bring stability for the young person in care and limit the effects of placement instability.	Limitations: Caution must be taken in generalising from a sample of this size. Strengths: It highlights "carer-identified" interventions that may have sustained placements. The perspectives of children and young people are also essential to understanding and improving placement stability; however, it is difficult to include children in research of this nature. The findings strongly suggest system factors identified in alternative care reviews are directly implicated in placement failure. The qualitative approach enabled an in-depth review of carer experiences, with direct questions of "possible interventions" highlighting systems issues that need further consideration to enable sustainability of placements.

Aim	Method	Findings and recommendations	NCPC comment
The study was designed to contribute knowledge to improving the ways in which out-of-home care services could meet the needs of children and young people through a participatory research process.	The research project employed a collaborative model of participation. The project took as its population the children and young people ($n = 47$) in Burnside's out-of-home care programs, birth parents ($n =10$), carers ($n = 34$), workers ($n =20$) and members of the senior management team ($n = 4$). Participant group interviews were conducted, interviews transcribed and then participants were given the opportunity to amend their transcripts. Focus groups were then conducted with 13 young people who agreed to participate further and with a number of carers ($n = 15$), workers ($n = 28$) and birth parents ($n = 8$). A further 3 young people provided comments on the presentation of the findings and in the development of the final report.	One of the main findings of the research project was what was important for children and young people in out-of-home care. The children and young people reported that maintaining connections based on familiarity/knowing and/or having something in common is very important. The main emotional need was to be loved and to have someone there for them. The children and young people also reported that having some power to be heard in their interactions with others is imperative to getting their needs met. Furthermore, a distinction was made by the young people between placement stability and continuity of relationships.	A very thorough research report that provides suggested principles for practice and policy for children and young people in out-of-home care.

Aim	Method	Findings and recommendations	NCPC comment
The study aimed to: • identify needs and issues for children and young people in foster care, from their perspective, using a literature review and consultative process; • promote good practice in the sector, through positively influencing service providers on how they provide foster care and how they support children and young people in care; and • recommend actions that could be taken to meet the needs of children and young people in foster care.	Children and young people in departmental and non-government foster care (*n* = 66) were consulted (approximately 4.8% of the foster care population aged 8 years and over at that time). The criterion for inclusion was that children had been in foster care for at least 3 months in the last 12 months. Children were offered a choice for interview structure: 45 had individual interviews, 8 had pair interviews, and 11 participated in focus groups. Interviews were conducted by expert independent consultants between September 1999 and January 2000.	For the most part, children and young people saw themselves as better off in foster care and reasonably happy. For many, foster care had considerable benefits. Many had been in their placements for a long time and were very grateful for and appreciative of their carers, who they saw as crucial to their happiness. One of the most significant, but not surprising, issues raised was the importance of and need for quality, trusting relationships, not only with carers but also with caseworkers. The picture that emerged was one of a system that has too many shortcomings and practices that too often mitigate against the best efforts of foster carers, and the needs of children and young people. For example, children rarely have a say in choosing their placement, they don't see their caseworker alone but want more from that key person, they have lost significant relationships as a result of coming into care, they have big gaps in knowledge about their history and birth family, they have low expectations of the system, and they can feel isolated and stigmatised. Many children were not aware of the NSW Community Services Commission, suggesting there is an opportunity for the commission to become more accessible and relevant to children. The report also made recommendations directed at service providers or "designated" agencies and others involved in the business of foster caring.	The strength of the report was that they used an independent consultative group, which provided an objective viewpoint. A limitation of the study was that caseworkers or district officers were able to veto involvement of a particular child if it was considered against their best interests at the time. The impact of this on the representativeness of the final sample is not known. Information on a number of variables was collected from a variety of sources, and the reliability may be questionable. Consultations did not include foster carers, district office or non-government caseworkers. Children in foster care were not compared with children not in care or those in other forms of care. Foster care continues to be one of the most frequently used care options, yet we know very little about it from the point of view of the child or young person. This very thorough report raises important issues about the views of young people in care.

Source: O'Neill, C. (2004). "I remember the first time I went into foster care—It's a long story …": Children, permanent parents, and other supportive adults talk about the experience of moving from one family to another. *Journal of Family Studies*, *10*, 205–219.

Aim	Method	Findings and recommendations	NCPC comment
The aim of study was to examine the experiences of children, permanent carers and other supportive adults in situations where the children had been placed into the out-of-home care system.	A longitudinal study that explored the experiences of how children experience alternative family care. The participants of the study included 8 young people aged from 18 months to 13 years at time of placement in their permanent families. They had all experienced multiple previous placements, and interviews were conducted with their permanent carers (birth and/or foster families, n = 51 discussions), their teachers (n = 26 discussions) and caseworkers (n = 34 discussions) over a period of three years. The children and permanent carers were interviewed up to 12 times, agency workers up to 4 times and teachers were interviewed twice a year.	The main findings that emerged from the interviews included themes of roles, boundaries, supports and the effects of the past. O'Neill noted that "the children struggled with the emotional effects of past abuse and neglect, as well as learning how to be part of a new family, while maintaining a relationship with their birth family" (p. 216).	O'Neill's findings provide important information on how children experience alternative care and have implications for the children, permanent families and professionals, especially in relation to the issue of family contact.

Aim	Method	Findings and recommendations	NCPC comment
To incorporate the voices of children in the research process, thereby providing a more complete picture of individual practice with Indigenous children and young people.	The study includes both quantitative (case files) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews) data. The sample comprised a random selection of 13 of the 50 children and young people in care included in the audit of case files of Indigenous children in the care of the department. The report provided the participants' responses in relation to their understanding of the care process, their care experiences and their connections to their families and culture.	Despite participants' responses to specific questions being included, the report lacked synthesis of these responses into general themes. As a result, it was not clear how research findings informed the recommendations. One of the key recommendations was that caseworkers, carers and residential workers be trained in the importance of Indigenous children and young people's connections to their culture.	The report provides important information concerning the experiences of Indigenous children in care. There appears to be limited integration between the views of the children and the report's recommendations. When including the voices of young people in care, it is important to find a meaningful way to incorporate their opinions and views into research recommendations. Research that consults children and young people but does not follow through by incorporating their views into recommendations may result in a loss of faith of children and young people in the process of being consulted. Importantly, the report noted that the project was negatively affected by some metropolitan departmental officers' resistance to allowing the project group to speak with the children and young people.