



Feeling safe and well in 'resi care': The importance of being valued, respected and cared about



What is this research about?

This project listened to young people who live in homes with youth workers because they've had tough times with their families or foster carers. These homes are called 'therapeutic residential care' or 'resi care' for short. The researchers wanted to know what makes it easier or harder for young people in resi care to learn to trust people and to feel safe.



Why is this an important topic?

It is important because young people in resi care often struggle to feel safe, trust people and make friends, which we all need to be happy and healthy.

What did we do?

The researchers talked with young people, staff, and managers in resi care homes to learn about what works well and what could be better. They also invited young people to fill out a survey with questions about their experiences.

**This document shares what we learned from the young people only.
Their names have been changed to protect their identity.**



Who took part in the study?

38

young people aged
12-18 years talked face to
face with the researchers.



140

young people aged
12-18 years answered
the survey.



In the survey, young people answered some questions about themselves.

Gender



60 were male



8 identified as non-binary



6 used another term



40 were female



16 didn't want to say



1 didn't answer

Living arrangements



Most young people had
lived in their current home
for 7-11 months.



Many young people had lived
in other resi care homes
before, usually for 2-6 months.

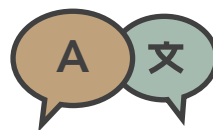


Most homes had 2 young
people living there.

Cultural background

46%

46% of the young people
were Aboriginal or Torres
Strait Islander.



80% spoke only English,
but some spoke other
languages as well like
Japanese, Arabic or Spanish.

Mental Health & Neurodiversity



58% said they had mental
health concerns like
anxiety or depression



54% said they had ADHD
33% said they had autism

Education



60% said they
were in school

12% were in **TAFE^{NSW}**



26% were in
another form
of education

Of those in school, 51% go every day and 35% are on a part-time plan.

Did young people feel safe in resi care?

Generally, the young people felt safe in resi care. However, there were some exceptions.

Who felt less safe?

- **Gender:** Girls felt less safe than boys.



They just kept putting on male workers after I asked for them to stop. I remember there were male workers every single day for a week straight at my house. I locked my room, I literally for that whole week, I didn't come out.
(Mia, 15 years, survivor of child sexual abuse)

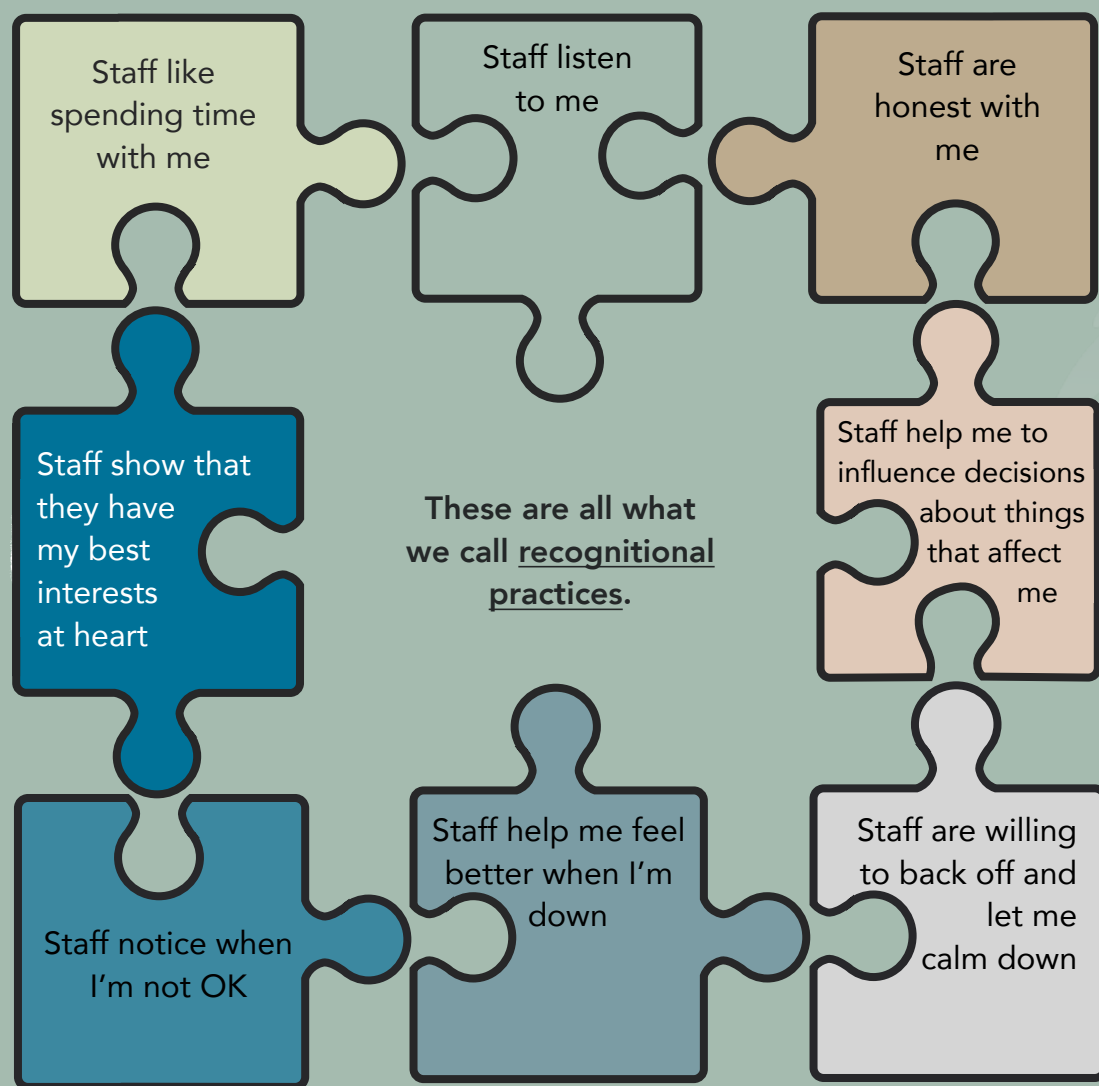
I've been in different houses ... it's overwhelming and stressful.
(Charles, 13 years)

- **Sexual Orientation:** Young people who were gay/lesbian/ bisexual/ or used a different term felt less safe to express culture, sexual orientation, and gender compared to young people who were straight.
- **House Size:** When there were more young people living in the house, young people felt less safe to be themselves.
- **House Moves:** When young people had moved to many different houses, they felt less physically safe.

I went to over 60 different placements. They'd always breakdown within the first one or two weeks. I just felt like the odd one out and I had bad anger issues.
(Sofia, 16 years)

What do staff in resi care do to help young people feel safe?

Young people felt safer when they were cared about, respected and valued. They identified what helps:

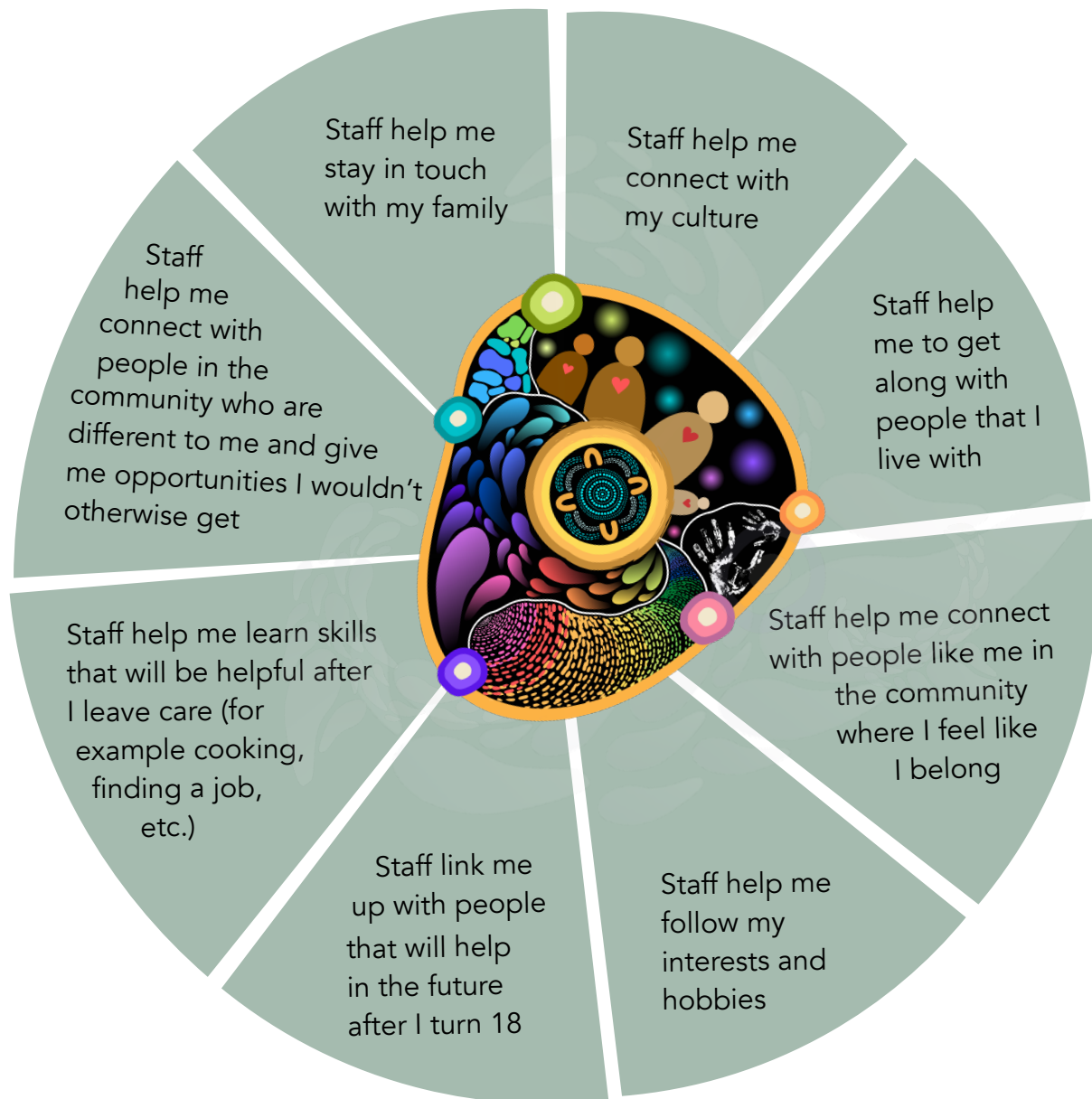


A good worker, for me, is someone who's dedicated, who won't complain about how much work they're being given, who won't be on their phone all the time. I like workers who are dedicated, who really love people, love working with these people.
(Evelyn, 14 years)

She just talks to me on my level and she actually helps me with stuff.
(Milo, 14 years)

They calm me down and say everything is going to be alright, nothing's going to happen. Yes, they try to calm me down and keep me safe.
(Liam, 15 years)

Young people also felt safer when staff helped them to connect to family and culture.



So my case manager, they're organising everything. So, they've got everything there to try and make contact with most of my family.

(Liam, 15 years)

She [practitioner] helps me out with a lot of stuff. She's always there when I need something and she's nice to me.

(Chloe, 17 years)

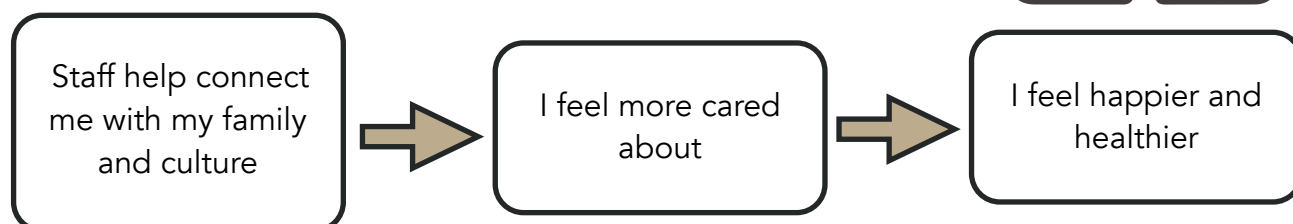
What did young people say helps to build their wellbeing in resi care?

Most young people living in resi care said they felt okay or happy some of time in the two weeks before the survey. But, 1 in 3 said they never or rarely felt happy.



The young people in the survey felt happiest when they felt emotionally safe and able to be themselves. They also felt better when they felt physically safe, and could express who they are, like their culture, gender or sexual orientation.

When young people said staff help them connect with their family and culture, they also felt more cared about, respected and valued. Feeling more cared about was linked with feeling happier and healthier. These connections are shown in the diagram:



What did young people want to change in resi care?

I'd also let the kids have friends over. Making that clear. I want friends over. I'm lonely... I feel like [not being allowed to have friends over] makes my friends think I don't want to have them over. When in reality, I do. It's just that they have stupid rules here saying I'm not allowed to.

(Luca, 15 years)

Interact more with the kids because some carers don't interact with us all that much. They're in the office probably on their phones or doing reports.

(Asher, 17 years)

I don't get a choice. I don't get a say on where I live. I go through the right complaints and everything, but they end up nowhere. Nothing really happens. One of the bosses came to speak with me, and I spoke with them and I told them all my concerns and issues, and nothing's happened.

(Felix, 15 years)

Young people wanted to see the following changes in their homes, in order of importance:

1 Friends to be allowed to visit me in the house

My family to be allowed to visit me in the house

2

Help to plan what happens after I turn 18

3

The house to feel more like a home

4

To stay in one house for longer

5

Staff to show me interest and warmth

6

Staff change jobs less often so they can get to know me better

7

Support to help me connect with my culture

8

Support from staff with my education

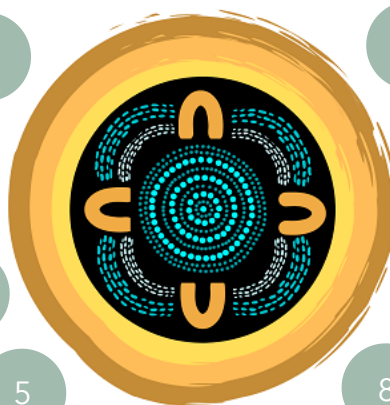
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Help with things that have happened to me in the past

10

Help when there are problems with my family relationships

11



Would you like to know more?

Visit the project website: <https://www.scu.edu.au/centre-for-children-and-young-people/our-research/strengthening-relationships-and-connections/>

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