

Participation

Creating opportunities for children and young people to contribute to decision-making

Real Kids, Real Carers

A continuing education resource for foster carers

Written by Paula Hayden and
Louise Mulrone



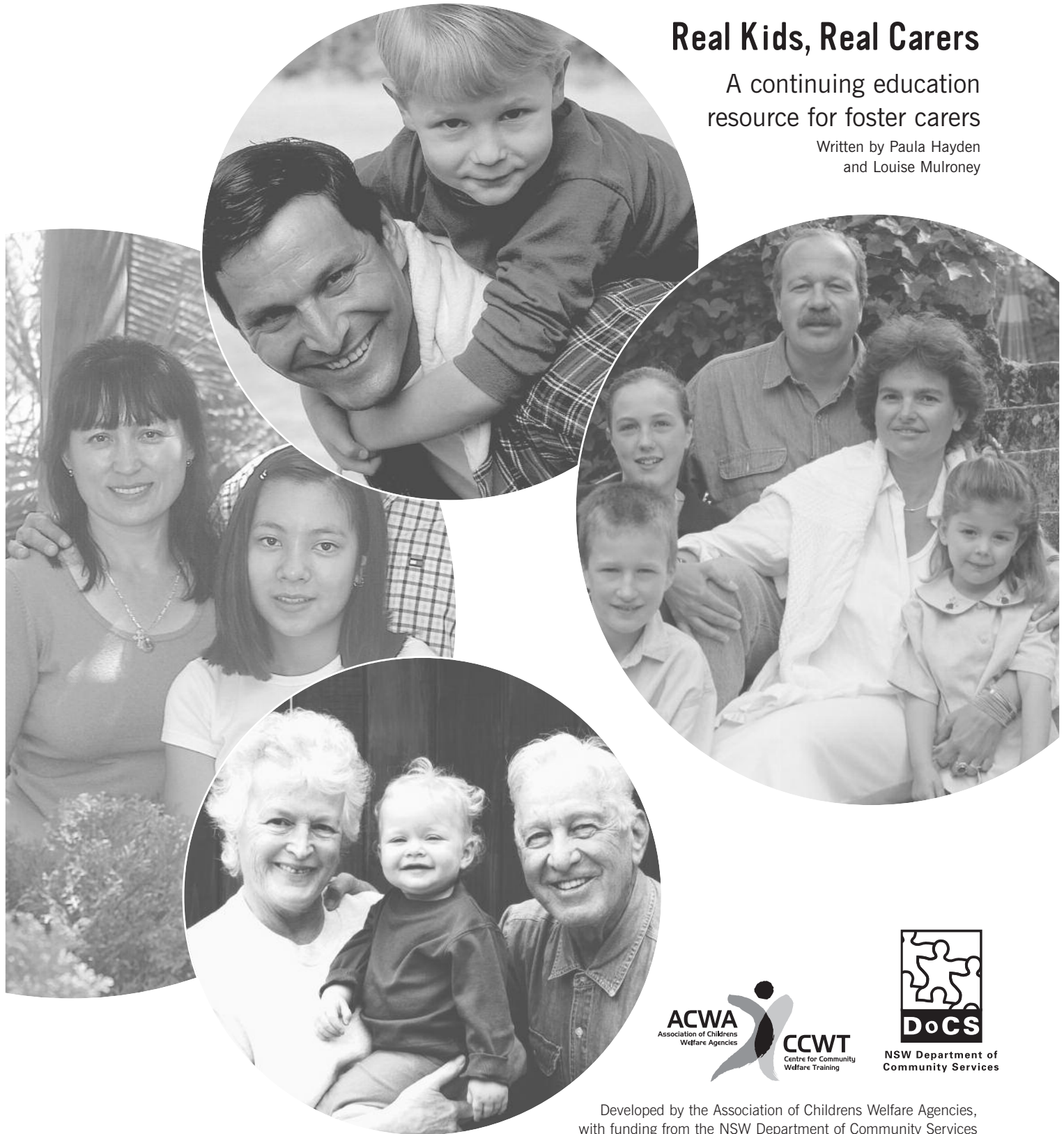
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Written by Paula Hayden and Louise Mulroney



ACWA
Association of Childrens
Welfare Agencies



CCWT
Centre for Community
Welfare Training



**NSW Department of
Community Services**

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Additional copies

Additional copies of this booklet can be downloaded from
www.acwa.asn.au/realkidsrealcarers/

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About Real Kids, Real Carers

This booklet is part of a continuing education resource for foster carers called *Real Kids, Real Carers*.

Real Kids, Real Carers contains 6 separate booklets covering topics of importance to foster carers.

The titles in the series

- ★ Independence and connections: caring for adolescents
- ★ I'm an individual: children and young people with disabilities
- ★ Participation: creating opportunities for children and young people to contribute to decision-making
- ★ Reality fostering: the impact of fostering on carers and their families
- ★ Whose job is this? team work in foster care
- ★ Whose problem is this? understanding and responding to challenging and difficult behaviour

Full copies of all titles in the series can be downloaded from www.acwa.asn.au/realkidsrealcarers/

Using these booklets

Each booklet sets out a two-hour education session. Experience has shown that foster carers are more able to access training that can be completed in a half day or evening.

The learning opportunities will be enhanced if sessions

- > involve an experienced foster carer as part of the training team
- > include agency workers as participants.

These sessions provide an introduction to the topic under discussion, though follow-up sessions may be required to explore the topic in depth.

These sessions are designed for all carers, whether very experienced or currently in their first placement. Children of foster carers, particularly those who are older teenagers and young adults, will also benefit from participating in these education sessions.

Training resources

These booklets provide detailed guides to all activities, including handout material to be photocopied for participants. Handout material can be found at the back of each booklet.



The booklets include “scripts” for trainers which are indicated by the use of the talking head icon.

Such scripts are not meant to be prescriptive, but provide input material that trainers can use and present in their own style.

Session information

Learning outcomes

At the end of the session, participants will be able to

- > understand the concept of participation
- > explain the importance of participation for children and young people
- > describe strategies to promote the participation of children and young people in out-of-home care.

Material required in session

- > Whiteboard or butchers paper
- > A workbook for each participant, made up of Handouts 1-9
- > Evaluation form for each participant (see the example at the end of this booklet)
- > Resources for carers to borrow from your agency relevant to the topic (posters, booklets, videos, agency policies on participation).

Length of session

- > 2 hours minimum

Training should include opportunities for carers to informally exchange information and build their networks. Ideally training will include additional time allocated for a meal or coffee breaks.

Background material for trainers

For further information regarding participation, visit www.create.org.au. This is the website of the Create Foundation who have resources on the participation process within out-of-home care.

Session Outline

1. Introduction (15 minutes)

Activity

Go around group and have each person say

- > his/her name (if group members don't already know each other)
- > a word or image that comes into their mind when they think of the phrase "participation by children and young people in decision making".

Briefly introduce yourself

Explain any necessary housekeeping details eg location of toilets, length of session, need to turn off mobile phones, arrangements for refreshments etc.

Explain group rules

Highlight the importance of

- > maintaining confidentiality ie not discussing personal details about any child, young person or adult in a way that means that other people in the group could identify them
- > respecting other people in the group by listening to their opinions, even if not the same as your own.

Explain purpose of session

Distribute workbooks.

Go through Handout 1. Check with participants that the learning outcomes on the top of Handout 1 fit their expectations of the session.

Explain that today's session is an opportunity to explore the concept of participation and what it means in practice. Acknowledge that participation means different things to different people in different situations.

2. Participation: your own experiences (15 minutes)

Question to discuss

Ask groups of three to discuss the following question.
Write question on board.

- ❖ How do you participate in decision making regarding
 - > children in your care
 - > children in your family
 - > social activities
 - > political activities
 - > your work place
 - > your community?

Get feedback from small groups.

Brainstorm, putting responses on whiteboard

- ❖ What does “participation of children and young people in decision making” mean to you?
- ❖ What are your fears and concerns about participation of children and young people in decision making?

Highlight participation issues



“Carers are in a particularly good position to help children and young people participate in decisions that affect them. Sometimes there can be concerns about what participation actually means in practice. A good starting point when looking at participation is to be very clear about what it is.”

3. What do young people say about participation? (10 minutes)

Activity

Ask participants to look at Handout 2 which are comments about participation from the perspective of young people.

Discuss

- ❖ What stood out for you about what young people in care said about participation?

Exploring what participation is



“It is important to remember that participation doesn’t mean that children and young people make all the decisions. It does mean children and young people need to be listened to and have their views taken seriously and treated with respect.

Children and young people want to be involved in decisions which affect them and need support in developing skills and confidence to assert their views and wishes.

Carers can be involved in that by making sure that kids in their care get a chance to influence what happens to them. Even what seems to be minor matters eg letting a young child choose what socks he or she is going to wear, can mean a lot to a child and assist them to develop skills in decision making.”

4. Participation practices (10 minutes)

Activity

In pairs, ask participants to identify a real life example for at least three of the practices on Handout 3. *Remind participants not to provide identifying details of people when discussing their examples.*

Get feedback from pairs, trying to get one example of each practice.

Explain children’s rights of participation



“It is important to acknowledge that carers already incorporate participation practices into their work. Later in the session, we will be looking at more strategies to assist children and young people participate.

The importance of children and young people participating and having their say in decisions that affect them is spelt out in the UN convention on the rights of the child. Child protection legislation in NSW highlights the importance of children and young people participating in decision making, and has identified this as a key principle in working with children and young people.

Setting out children and young people’s right to participate in legislation reflects the move toward recognising children and young people as stakeholders in decisions, rather than being seen as the passive recipients of decision making.”

Read through Handout 4 “Participation principles” that sets out key phrases in the UN Convention and in NSW legislation that should guide carers in their work with children and young people.

5. The purpose of participation (10 minutes)

Question to discuss

- ❖ Why is it important for children and young people in care to participate in decision making?

Activity

Go through **Handout 5** “Purpose of participation” and ask for comments.

Summary of issues



“The increased level of children’s participation reflects the increased awareness across the community of the value of children and young people’s participation. The last fifteen years has seen moves towards encouraging children and young peoples’ increased participation in education, health, and leisure.

There are lots of perceptions and stereotypes about children and young people that may mean we put up barriers to participation. For example, if we think that all young people are irresponsible and rebellious, or that children are not capable of making good decisions, then we could easily fall into the trap of believing that there is little point in encouraging their participation.

Opportunities for children and young people to participate has been limited in the past. Too often decisions have been made by a range of adults, many of whom may not even know the child or young person. This has led to inappropriate decisions being made.

For children and young people who have been abused and neglected this can reinforce their powerlessness and belief that their life is dependent on the whim of adults.

As opportunities for children and young people to participate increase, they grow in confidence and can contribute more effectively in building a system which is more responsive to their needs and which can deliver significantly better outcomes.

Children will participate in different ways according to their age and stage of development. A critical factor in their ability to influence major decisions in their life is their past experience in participation in the everyday decisions that happen all the time. Carers who give children choices and a chance to have their say are making a critical contribution to those children’s long term well being.”

6. Building participatory relationships (20 minutes)

Explain the role of carers in encouraging participation



“Participatory relationships emerge from listening relationships. Children and young people need caring respectful adults whom they can trust and who provide them with opportunities to make choices and be heard. Influencing decisions from the earliest days of the placement develops trust and confidence in children and their caregivers, and contributes to the child’s growing sense of identity and confidence.

Participation does not mean that children and young people make all the decisions. It does mean that children and young people get a chance to be involved in when a decision about them is being made, to have a say and that their viewpoint is listened to.

When children have choices and opportunities to participate in the day to day decisions, when they have been heard in relation to the smaller things in the lives, they are much more likely to have confidence in carers hearing them in relation to the bigger issues in their lives.”

Activity

Ask participants to individually look at Handout 6 and note down in relation to day-to-day issues, the ways that children and young people in their care get to have a choice.

Feedback ideas to big group.

In pairs, ask participants to look at Handout 7 “Encouraging participation?”. Look at the list of statements and tick those which are supportive and likely to generate children and young people’s participation.

Get feedback by asking participants which responses they chose, and what made those responses helpful and supportive.

Read through Handout 8 “Communication that encourages participation”.

Invite questions and comments from participants.

Describe strategies to ensure participation in formal situations



“Carers have a key role in creating a relationship with the child or young person in their care, where the child or young person trusts that their opinion. This makes it easier for participation to occur in significant and formal situations such as case conferences. Carers can help young people participate in case conferences by helping the young person clarify their ideas about what they might like to see happen. If young people choose not to be present, a carer can work with the caseworker in ensuring young people can participate through other means eg use of drawing, videos, audio tape, written material.

Carers can also check that written records detail the child’s view, even if it is not identical to the final decision taken.

Children and young people need adults to create opportunities for them to participate and support them in process of participating.”

7. Participation in practice (30 minutes)

Activity

Ask participants to look at Handout 9. In groups of three, participants to read through the case studies and answer the questions at the end of the page.

Get feedback from groups about any particular issues or ideas that stood out to them.

8. Conclusion (5 minutes)

Summarise a key point from the workshop



“A good quote to finish with comes from Nosworthy & Lane, ‘Having a Say Report’ (1996). The quote refers to the importance of building strong, caring relationships with children and young people which enable them to participate in decision making:

It’s become clear that it isn’t expert knowledge or our professional techniques that are of most value, but instead simple displays of caring and the building of solid, trusting relationships.”

Activity

Ask participants to say one thing that stood out for them from today’s training, or anything they may do differently.

Invite participants to complete the evaluation sheet.
(See the example at the end of this booklet)

Learning Outcomes of Session

At the end of the session, participants will be able to

- > understand the concept of participation
- > explain the importance of participation for children and young people
- > describe strategies to promote the participation of children and young people in out of home care.

Session Outline

1. Introduction
2. Participation: your own experiences
3. What do young people say about participation?
4. Participation practices
5. The purpose of participation
6. Building participatory relationship
7. Participation in practice
8. Conclusion

What young people say about participation

Young people

- > want to participate in all decisions including day to day decisions
- > feel excluded and devalued when they cannot participate
- > expect their voice to be heard and respected
- > want a range of ways to participate
- > do not think getting a say means having your own way
- > appreciate that options may be limited, but still want to be consulted.

From the "Giving a Voice to Children" Report, Sept 1997

Participation practices: Ensuring that children and young people have a say

	One real life example of this is....
Encourage children and young people to have their say in the big and little things	
Use words when you talk with children and young people that they can understand	
Let children know that what they say is important	
Give children and young people time to think about things before they make decisions	
Give information to children and young people so they contribute to making the right decision	
Not assume that adults have the responsibility to make all the decisions on behalf of children and young people	
Believe that children and young people can work together with adults to resolve their problems	

Participation principles

The importance of children and young people participating and having their say in decisions that affect them is spelt out in the UN convention on the rights of the child. Child protection legislation in NSW *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* underscores the importance of children and young people participating in decision making, and has been identified as a key principle in working with children and young people.

Legislation that sets out children and young people's right to participate, reflects the move toward recognising children and young people as stakeholders in decisions, rather than being seen as the passive recipients of decision making.

Article 12 of the UN (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child includes these key phrases

- > **“Children are entitled to participate in all decisions that affect them”**
- > **“Their views are to be given sufficient weight”**
- > **“According to their age and maturity”**

The principle of participation is enshrined in the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* which includes

“Whenever a child or young person is able to form his or her own views on a matter concerning his or her own welfare, he or she must be given an opportunity to express these views freely and these views are to be given due weight in accordance with the developmental capacity of the child or young person and the circumstances.” (from Section 9)

Purpose of participation

For children and young people in care

Better care: Children and young people know more about themselves than anyone else, so we need their expertise when decisions are being made.

More stable placements: The more input children and young people have on placement, the more likely they are to want it to continue.

Reduces abuse: When children and young people are recognised and acknowledged through participation, they are more likely to identify and report abusive practices.

Increased self esteem and confidence: Children and young people feel good when their perspective is valued.

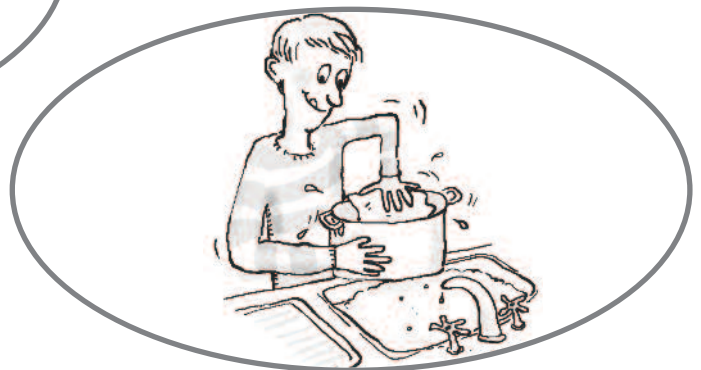
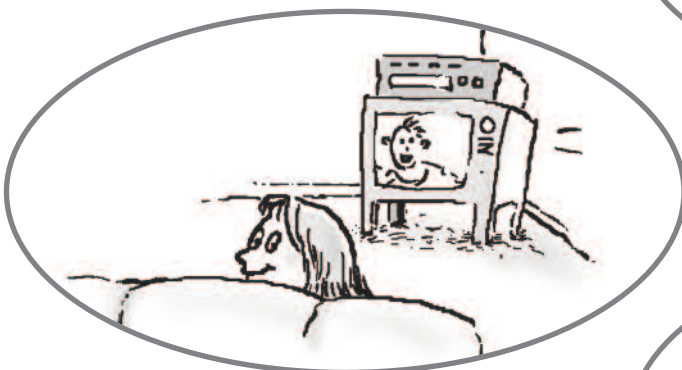
Preparation for adulthood: Children and young people need lots of practise in decision making so they can have the skills to make decisions throughout their life.

For carers

Satisfaction of providing good care: Carers can provide better quality care when they are clear about children and young people's needs.

Less tension and conflict in placement: Encouraging participation shows you respect children and young people and their opinions. Respect generates respect.

A question of choice



Encouraging participation?

- A. The school rang, you've been in trouble again, you're grounded...
- OR**
- B. I've had a call from school again. Can we have a talk about it, after dinner?
- A. Shirley rang, says she wants a chat. Could we have a chat first?
- OR**
- B. Shirley rang; she wants to speak to me, what have you been up to this time?
- A. It's really tough your dad's in a jail five hundred kilometres away. I wonder if there are other ways you could get to communicate with him?
- OR**
- B. I know you want to see your dad. Is it my fault he's in prison five hundred kilometres away?
- A. It's early days, make yourself comfortable. Tomorrow when you're settled a bit we can have a chat about what happens around here.
- OR**
- B. This is the routine, it's fitted for all the other kids we've had. Follow that and you'll be right.
- A. I know what you're saying, responsibility is important. I need to feel you can be responsible in little things before big things, what are some of the ways you can do this?
- OR**
- B. So you want more responsibility! What about taking responsibility for the mess in your room?
- A. It's time for the case conference. If you're coming, you'd better work out what you're going to say.
- OR**
- B. Hey it's the case conference next week, it's really important you have a say. Would you like to have a chat about it later on in the week? Who would you like to work this out with, me or Namita your caseworker?

Communication that encourages participation

1. Active listening

- > Focus on the child/ young person
- > Listen
- > Resist interrupting
- > Give them your total attention
- > Appropriate eye contact
- > Acknowledge what is being said

2. Helpful questions

Sensitive use of questions and seeking clarification from children and young people can be a very effective way of encouraging children and young people to participate. **Open questions** encourage children and young people to talk and to participate more fully.

Examples of **open questions** include:

- > “How would you like things to be different?”
- > “What would you like to stay the same?”
- > “What can I do that would be helpful?”
- > “Tell me...”

Handout 8 continues on next page >>>

Communication that encourages participation (Continued)

Open questions begin with:

- > Why?
- > How?
- > Who?
- > What?
- > When?
- > Where?

Closed questions can be less helpful in getting children and young people to express their ideas. **Closed questions** often generate **yes/no** responses. They often begin with phrases like:

- > Did you?
- > Could you?
- > Can I?
- > Would you?

Case Studies

Leif's story

Leif is 9. He has a mild intellectual delay and has been in care for five years. He was removed from his parents care due to physical abuse and chronic neglect.

Since his entry into care Leif has had three placements. The first placement was short term. His second placement was intended to be long term. However, it broke down after allegations of abuse against the carers were substantiated.

Leif has been with Demi and Aristos for six months. This is a short-term placement until a long-term placement can be found. Leif is only just now opening up with Demi and Aristos, and is very withdrawn with people he does not know or in strange situations. A case conference has been arranged to discuss Leif's future. Leif talks a lot about wanting to see his grandmother, who lives in a country town. Demi and Aristos are eager to help Lief communicate his ideas about his next placement and possible contact with his grandmother to those attending the case conference.

- ❖ What might Demi and Aristos do to ensure Leif's wishes in relation to contact with his grandmother and any future placements are known?
- ❖ What might be some of the challenges they face in encouraging Leif to make his feelings and views known and how might they overcome them?

Handout 9 continues on next page >>>

Case Studies (Continued)

Carlo's story

Carlo is 12 and has been in Bill and Cézanne's care for three years. He is due to change from primary to high school in the next six months. Carlo wants to attend the local high school because that's where most of his friends will be going.

Bill and Cézanne and the caseworker would prefer Carlo went to a smaller school where he could receive more help with his studies and make some new friends whom they hope would have a more positive influence on Carlo.

During the last discussion about the school issue Carlo said "I'm old enough to make my own decisions. I'm sick of you making all the decisions around here".

- ❖ What might Bill and Cézanne do and say to Carlo that enables him to participate in the decision in relation to school?
- ❖ How will Carlo know that Bill and Cézanne are committed to him having a say in decision-making?

Crystal's story

Crystal, aged 12, is Aboriginal. She has recently been placed in temporary care because her father is sick and it has not been possible to find a placement with Aboriginal carers although enquiries are still underway to secure an appropriate placement.

Dot and Peter have agreed to care for Crystal until a more suitable placement can be found. Crystal has indicated to Dot and Peter that she would like to return to her aunty's care. She cannot remember her aunty's phone number but knows she lives in a large regional city. Dot and Peter are not sure why Crystal has not been placed with her aunty.

- ❖ What are some of the practical things Dot and Peter might do to encourage Crystal to participate in decisions that affect her?

Evaluation Form

Workshop topic

1. Overall, how would you rate the workshop?
(circle the number that best matches your rating)

1	2	3	4	5	6
Poor					Excellent

2. What was most useful part of the workshop for you?
.....
.....
.....

3. What was least useful?
.....
.....
.....

4. What will you do differently as a result of this workshop?
.....
.....
.....

5. Would you recommend this workshop to other carers? *(tick one)*

Yes No

Why?
.....
.....
.....