

Care to Listen? report

Overview

In December 2019, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (the Centre) circulated its first annual *Care to Listen?* survey to Victorian residential care workers. The survey gave the Centre the opportunity to directly engage with the residential care workforce and canvass their feedback on the nature of their work.

The survey was completed by 78 workers across metropolitan and regional Victoria and captured qualitative data about the day-to-day experiences of the workforce. The results illustrated that the respondents were committed to improving the wellbeing, living environment and life outcomes for the young people living in residential care homes. From the joy of watching families reunify, to helping a young person learn how to ride a bicycle - workers took pride in the achievements of those in their care.

Victoria's residential care workers care deeply about creating a safe, stable and healthy environment so that young people can thrive. Residential care workers spoke about striving to create homes that promoted trust, open communication and stability, seeing first-hand the positive impacts it has on young people in residential care.

The Centre thanks all of Victoria's residential care workers for the work they do.

Summary

Overwhelming, the survey highlighted the dedication of residential care workers to looking after the children and young people in their care.

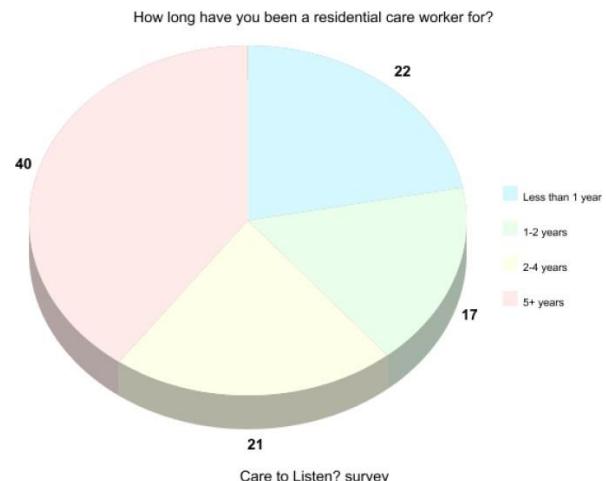
The survey responses showed that residential care workers have much in common:

- A real passion among respondents for their work and the children and young people they care for;
- A diversity in the responsibilities of the role, from helping young people with their shopping to supporting them with legal proceedings;
- Willingness to go outside the bounds of their work to ensure young people had care and support when they needed it;
- Helping young people manage their trauma using evidence-informed practices;
- The importance of skills such as patience, perseverance, empathy and humour;
- The value of building trusting, caring relationships; and
- A need for workers to practice self-care and boundary setting.

Analysis

Question 1: How long have you been employed as a residential care worker?

The survey showed that 40 per cent of respondents had been employed as a residential care worker for more than five years, 22 per cent were employed for less than a year, 21 per cent for two to four years and 17 per cent had been employed for one to two years.



Question 2: What's been the highlight of your year in your residential care home?

The majority of highlights related to children or young people's achievements (such as seeing them learn new skills, graduate or gain employment), while other highlights included being thanked for their work and feeling confident in their role.

"Hearing a recording of a song a young person wrote and sang."

"Engaging a young person into a Geelong Community service which has enabled him to create life long positive mentors that are excellent role models for him and have improved his perception of adults."

"Having a YP leave care and being successful in everyway and loving life." "4

young people 15-16 years all engaged in education!"

"Working with a great team to providing warmth, encouragement, support, structure, empathy and consistency to the young people in our care leading them to a positive future."

"A young person I was working with was moving out into another residential care unit. A few days before they left they thanked me for everything I did for them, and told me that they felt like they could really trust me."

Question 3: Name a time you helped a young person in a residential care home.

Many respondents helped young people with everyday physical tasks (such as their homework, job applications, using cutlery or with cooking), while other respondents mentioned helping a young person seek help for their self-harming sister and supporting a transgender young person with identity development. The responses illustrated that residential care workers did not hesitate when it came to assisting young people in their care, regardless of the task.

"I have supported a LGBTI transgender young person in identity development. As well as this connect the young person to LGBTI communities, participation & advocate to transition into his real self."

"I assist every day in their care and mental health, just knowing they can trust an adult that genuinely cares for them unconditionally."

"I help young people to regulate their emotions and work through them. I am always there to provide an ear and guidance and they have really appreciated it."

*"A new YP who really struggles with me was extremely angry, swearing at me and telling me to f*** off. I wrote him a note to say I cared about him and I was there when he was ready to talk calmly. I later saw he had put the letter away to keep, which was pretty special."*

"Assist them to apply for jobs, to get into Fed Uni and hear them happy about their own achievements of the day"

Question 4: What are the most important skills you need to be a good residential care worker?
 Several participants listed skills including patience, empathy, understanding and compassion.

Other skills included conflict management, emotional intelligence and therapeutic crisis intervention management.



The word cloud includes the following words:
resilience: like, open, honest, firm, kind, compassionate, transparent.
calm: parent, respectful, Being, knowing.
understanding: attitude, positive, coregulate, etc., otherwise, Common, people, Good, children, brain, forgiveness, strong, love, able.
Patience: tell, young, look, follow, patient, fair, rapport, values, empathy, work, times, show, yourself, care, sense, need, grow, person, after, boundaries, genuine, trauma, temperament, initiative, remain, Communication, compassion, build, flexible, Empathy-Listen-change, wisdom.

Question 5: Can you name any small changes that you've made that have made a positive impact in your residential case home?

Residential care workers utilised their empathy, creativity and humour to create healthy and homely environments for young people. The workers were willing to try new methods when it came to creating a positive impact in the rest house. Some participant introduced routines, while other changes included cooking nutritious meals, introducing evening supper and chats, and making an effort to say hello and goodbye at the start and end of shifts.

"I have made a huge change in the outlook on health and nutrition within the home I work. This has resulted in the eradication of soft drink within the home, created a healthy culture around meal times, and enabled staff to use more vegetables and nutritious foods."

"I am very organised and I love cleaning. I think making residential care homes cleaner and more orderly has a positive influence on the young people's hearts and souls."

"I helped set up the land we are on as it has animals and things to do some kids really respond well to it. it helps them nurture animals and do things of a practical nature."

"Approaching (some) difficult situations with humour and inquisitiveness has worked well and has deescalated challenging situations."

"Creating a homely comfortable and safe atmosphere. Decorating the house with lots of bright colors and positive quotes."

Question 6: What do you find most rewarding about working in residential care?

Almost all respondents found it rewarding to see young people develop new skills and confidence in their day to day lives. Residential care workers feel an immense sense of pride about the young people in their care. Specific responses included seeing young people display more positive behaviour, manage their emotions and work through trauma. The responses demonstrated how rewarding residential care workers find their work and see themselves as being part of the young people's journey.

"Being and advocate for young people."

"Seeing a change in behaviours with YP's and seeing a bit of that anger and rage disappear when I come on shift and they are happy to see me."

"Showing the young people that they are important and they matter and watching them grow."

"The outcomes of the young people & milestones they meet from developmental delays ie. getting a job, using their trauma from strength based approach to become citizens of their communities, impacting small changes to the residential care framework to better it long term for the future"

"Creating a supportive environment for our young people to grow into resilient and strong adults for the future"

"When a YP says I trust you- knowing the YP doesn't trust many people this is an honour it takes a lot of hard work to get there but gaining trust is beautiful as you can form a really positive relationship."

"Seeing young people returning home to their families."

"The outcomes of the young people & milestones they meet from developmental delays ie. getting a job, using their trauma from strength based approach to become citizens of their communities, impacting small changes to the residential care framework to better it long term for the future"

Question 7: What are some tips you would give to new residential care workers entering the workforce?

The responses demonstrated a deep understanding of young people, trauma informed practices and the need to ensure that self-care is part of their work. Residential care workers shared practical and informative tips to promote wellbeing and better workplace habits. Many of the respondents emphasised the importance of listening to young people and how this has helped them develop a greater understanding of their role as a residential care worker.

"To be able to support a young person fully is to ask, 'What happened to the young person?' rather than 'What's wrong with the young person?'"

"Be trauma informed so you understand why the behaviour is occurring. Don't assume that they are bad kids."

"Remember these kids aren't what happened to them and there is a child under that tough exterior."

"Residential care is hard work but quite rewarding when you see your team band together and work with the same mind frame with the end goal of helping someone. It really does take a village to 'raise' a child."

Conclusion

The Victorian residential workforce is one that deeply cares for and listens to young people in residential care homes. Residential care workers take immense pride in the work they do and go to great lengths to achieve the best possible outcomes for young people. Their dedication to their work can be seen in the passion they bring to the residential care homes day after day.

The Centre thanks those residential care workers who participated in the survey. We would also like to acknowledge the entire Victorian residential care workforce who support young people living in residential care homes.