

Away from Placement Inquiry - Consultation Paper

About this inquiry

In May 2026, the NSW Ombudsman started an inquiry¹ into children and young people who spend time away² from their Intensive Therapeutic Care (ITC) placement without permission.

ITC is a residential out-of-home care (OOHC) program for children and young people with 'complex needs who are either unable to be supported in foster care or require specialised and intensive supports to maintain stability in their care arrangements'.³

We are examining:

- why children and young people spend time away from their ITC placement
- children and young people's experiences while away from placement
- how agencies and services respond to children and young people being away from placement
- opportunities to strengthen supports, safeguards and system responses.

We invite stakeholders to make a submission in response to this consultation paper by **4 September 2026**.

We are aware of the current independent evaluation of the ITC program⁴ and are also monitoring DCJ's child protection reforms for any implications for the Inquiry.⁵

Why is this issue important?

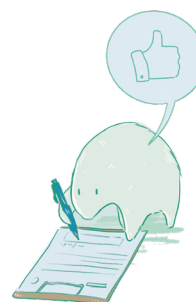
Children and young people who spend time away from their placement can be exposed to significant risks to their safety, welfare and wellbeing, and may miss out on important relationships, connections and supports.

We received information and stakeholder submissions about this issue during the 2025 ITC inquiry which found that:

*'Children in ITC placements who then leave their placement (assessed as 'not in placement') are highly vulnerable to exploitation, homelessness, and harm. These children do not receive the minimum standard of care other children in OOHC receive and have no authorised safe place to return to.'*⁶

We are now seeking to further understand this issue and are interested in hearing about your experiences, observations, research, policies, data, examples of good practice and opportunities for improvement.

The information, questions and themes in this consultation paper should not be taken as indicative of the NSW Ombudsman's ultimate findings.



1. Under section 11(1)(e) of the Community Services (Complaints, Review and Monitoring) Act 1993 (CS CRAMA). Under CS CRAMA, the NSW Ombudsman has functions to: monitor and review the delivery of community services, conduct inquiries into matters affecting service providers and receivers and make recommendations for improvements in the delivery of community services. This includes community services that are provided by the non-government sector, with funding or authorisation from the NSW Government.

2. The term 'away' has been chosen after consultation with young people and young adults who have had a care experience.

3. Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) Website, [Residential care placements](#) (accessed 23 June 2026).

4. DCJ previously advised that an independent evaluation of ITC was due to commence in 2026 to be completed in June 2027: see [NSW Ombudsman | Inquiry into Intensive Therapeutic Care Report](#), p.55.

5. See DCJ's [NSW Out-of-Home Care Strategy](#) (February 2026).

6. [NSW Ombudsman | Inquiry into Intensive Therapeutic Care Report](#), p.40.

What do we mean by ‘away from placement’?

‘Away from placement’ refers to children and young people spending unapproved time away from their ITC placement, whether for short, repeated or extended periods. Time away from placement is considered ‘unapproved’ when a child or young person leaves placement without permission. We are interested in children and young people’s experiences who:

- are absent and their location is unknown
- are staying with family, peers, partners, others or independently without approval
- no longer have an open ITC placement to return to because the placement was closed following an extended absence (‘not in placement’).

Submissions may also be made through:

- **online form:** www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/about-us/news-events/news/away-from-placement-inquiry
- **uploaded document:** www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/about-us/news-events/news/away-from-placement-inquiry
- **email:** awayfromplacement.inquiry@ombo.nsw.gov.au
- **audio or voice recording:** upload here www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/about-us/news-events/news/away-from-placement-inquiry or leave a voice message on 0436 618 296
- **text message:** 0436 618 296
- **letter:** NSW Ombudsman, Away From Placement Inquiry Team, Level 25, 580 George Street, Sydney NSW 2000.

Submissions close on 4 September 2026.

Making a submission

Anyone can make a submission to the inquiry, and we invite submissions from children and young people with lived experience (see [Factsheet for children and young people](#)), families, carers, service providers, government agencies, peak bodies, researchers, and other interested stakeholders.

You may answer all, some or none of the consultation questions. You are also welcome to provide any other information relevant to children and young people being away from their ITC placement.

If you require assistance to make a submission or would prefer to speak with someone about providing information verbally, please contact the inquiry team on **0436 618 296** or by email at awayfromplacement.inquiry@ombo.nsw.gov.au to book in a time.



Hearing directly from Aboriginal people and organisations

We want Aboriginal people to feel safe and supported when participating in this inquiry. You are welcome to participate with a trusted support person, or please contact the inquiry team to find out what cultural support is available.

Aboriginal children and young people are significantly over-represented in ITC placements. We recognise the importance of understanding their experiences through a cultural lens, including the role of family, kin, community, culture and Country.

We particularly encourage Aboriginal children and young people, families, communities, organisations and advocates to share their experiences, perspectives and ideas for improvement.

Aboriginal staff will provide cultural advice throughout the inquiry to help inform consultation, analysis and reporting.

Hearing directly from children and young people with lived experience

We are committed to upholding the human rights of all children and young people to promote their safety, welfare and wellbeing in our work. In doing so, we commit to seek out, listen to, and support their meaningful participation in issues that affect them.

Hearing directly from children and young people in OOHC with lived experience of being away from their placement, places their voices, experiences and ideas about what needs to change at the centre of this Inquiry.

Children and young people [can decide how they would like to participate.](#)

Hearing directly from families

Families often have unique insights into why their children spend time away from placement, where they go, what support they need, and what helps them feel safe, connected and supported.

We particularly encourage parents, siblings, extended family members and kin to share their experiences and perspectives, including what they believe contributes to children and young people spending time away from placement and what could improve outcomes for children and families.

Hearing directly from frontline workers

Frontline workers often have direct experiences supporting children and young people before, during and after periods away from placement, and can provide important insights into what works, what does not and why.

We will engage with frontline workers through [a survey](#) and meetings. These will provide important information about operational challenges, effective practices and opportunities for improvement.

Workers may participate in [a survey](#) or make a submission regardless of whether their employer makes a separate submission.



Privacy, confidentiality and use of submissions

While you do not need to provide your name or any identifying information, we would appreciate information about your connection to the issue (for example, whether you are a child or young person, family member, carer, worker, service provider, advocate, researcher or government agency representative). This will help us understand the different perspectives being shared.

Anonymous submissions can also be made.

The NSW Ombudsman has legal obligations to protect the privacy and confidentiality of people who provide information to us and people referred to in submissions.

We will use submissions to inform the inquiry and prepare our report to Parliament. We may refer to or quote

information provided in submissions, but we will not publish your name or identifying information without your explicit consent.

If information provided to the inquiry raises serious concerns about the safety or wellbeing of a child or young person, maladministration, corrupt conduct, or other matters within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, we may consider other actions as part of our statutory functions.

If you have any questions about privacy, confidentiality or how information may be used, please see further information on our [website](#) or contact us at awayfromplacement.inquiry@ombo.nsw.gov.au or on 0436 618 296.



Consultation questions

The themes and questions in this paper are intended to guide consultation, please answer as many or as few questions as you wish. We are keen to hear about what you think is not working, as well as information or examples of effective practice and opportunities to strengthen supports, services and systems.

Understanding children's safety, welfare and wellbeing

For the purposes of this inquiry, we use the terms safety, welfare and wellbeing broadly.

- Safety concerns may include danger, abuse, neglect and exposure to risks such as exploitation, violence, homelessness, substance misuse, criminalisation, self-harm or suicide, and other circumstances.
- Welfare may include a child's access to basic physical needs, health or education.
- Wellbeing may refer to a child's emotional, relational, or social development or connection to family, kin, culture and community.

A child may experience short- and long-term outcomes as a result of their time away from placement.

Why children and young people are away from their placement

This focus area examines the factors that contribute to children and young people leaving, remaining away from, or repeatedly spending time away from their ITC placements.

Consultation questions

1. What factors contribute to children and young people being away and what role do the factors play? Factors may include placement stability, placement matching, relationships, family connection, autonomy, culture, and mental health.
2. Do factors contributing to children and young people being away differ for particular groups of children (for example, by age, gender, disability, cultural identity, location or history of repeated absences)?
3. Are there cultural, kinship, family and/or community factors that may contribute to Aboriginal children and young people being away?

Impact on children and young people's safety, welfare and wellbeing when they are away from placement

We are examining children and young people's experiences, risks, relationships and outcomes while they are away from their ITC placement.

Consultation questions

4. What impact does spending time away from placement have on children and young people's safety, welfare and wellbeing?
5. What impact does repeated or prolonged absence from placement have?
6. What impact does spending time away from placement have on connection to family, kin, culture and community?
7. Are some children more vulnerable to risks or harms while away from placement? If so, why?
8. What impact, if any, does having a placement 'closed' ('not in placement') have on children and young people's safety, welfare and wellbeing?



Responses to children and young people when they are away from placement

We are examining how ITC providers, DCJ, police, health services, schools, youth homelessness services, and other agencies respond when children and young people are away from their ITC placement, including what works well and where improvements may be needed.

Consultation questions

9. How do services and agencies currently respond when a child or young person is away from placement?
10. What works well in supporting children's and young people's safety, welfare and wellbeing while they are away from placement and on their return to their placement?
11. What barriers or challenges arise when supporting children who are away from placement?
12. Are there examples of effective interagency responses, programs or practices that have improved outcomes for children away from placement?

Monitoring of children and young people when they are away from placement

We are examining how children and young people are monitored while away from placement, how risks are identified and managed, and how agencies coordinate and learn from responses to children and young people spending time away from their ITC placement.

Consultation questions

13. How do government agencies and service providers monitor children and young people, share information, and coordinate responses while they are away from placement?
14. Are there any gaps, barriers or challenges in monitoring children and young people, or coordinating responses, while they are away from placement?
15. How are repeated absences, recurring risks or patterns over time identified, monitored and responded to?
16. How are systemic issues, trends or learnings identified and used to improve policy, practice or service delivery?
17. How does monitoring, identification of risks, and agency coordination differ for particular groups of children (for example, by age, gender, disability, cultural identity, location)?
18. How are the cultural, family, kin, and community needs of Aboriginal children and young people considered when monitoring and responding to periods of being away from placement?

Please see our website for further information about the inquiry.



Scan the QR code
to find out more
on our website.

Contact us

✉ awayfromplacement.inquiry@ombo.nsw.gov.au

☎ 0436 618 296

🌐 www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/about-us/news-events/news/away-from-placement-inquiry