

ACT GOVERNMENT

*A Step Up for Our Kids*  
Out of Home Care Strategy 2015-2020

# WHAT WE KNOW OVERVIEW

October 2021



# Acknowledgement of Country

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Artwork: Detail of *Meeting Place* by Leah Brideson

The Community Services Directorate acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the Canberra Region and that the region is also an important meeting place and significant to other Aboriginal groups.

The Directorate respects the continuing culture and the contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make to the life of this city and surrounding region.

## A Step Up for Our Kids – Background

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- The Strategy was launched on 22 January 2015 and saw a significant shift in the way the ACT Government and community sector organisations provided out of home care services to children, young people, their families and carers.
- The primary focus of the Strategy was to support families so that children and young people can remain safely living at home, or where they had entered care, that they could be safely returned home to their families.
- Where children were in out of home care, we have focused on improving outcomes for all children and young people living in out of home care (including those living with their biological family in kinship care).
- The intention of the Strategy is to improve outcomes for children and young people in care by providing more flexible, therapeutic, trauma-informed, child focused services and to reduce the demand for out of home care places.

# A Step Up for Our Kids – Priorities

The Strategy commits child protection and out of home care services to hearing the voice of the child or young person, better understanding their needs and providing flexible, personalised services, that can scale up and down in intensity as the child or young person's needs change over time.

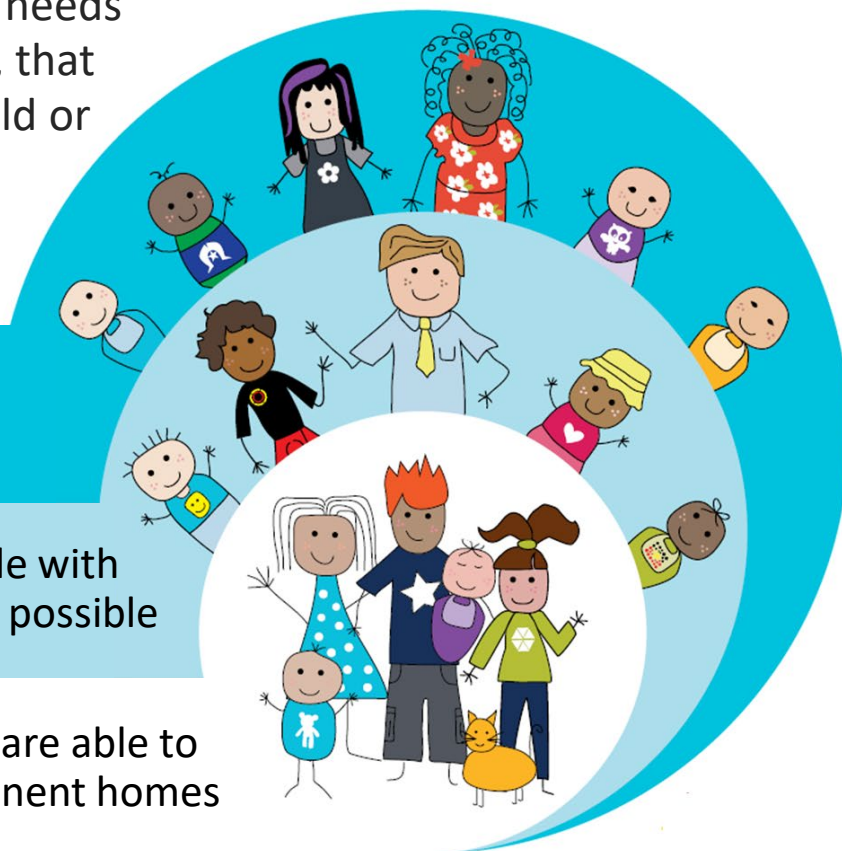
## OUR PRIORITIES ARE:

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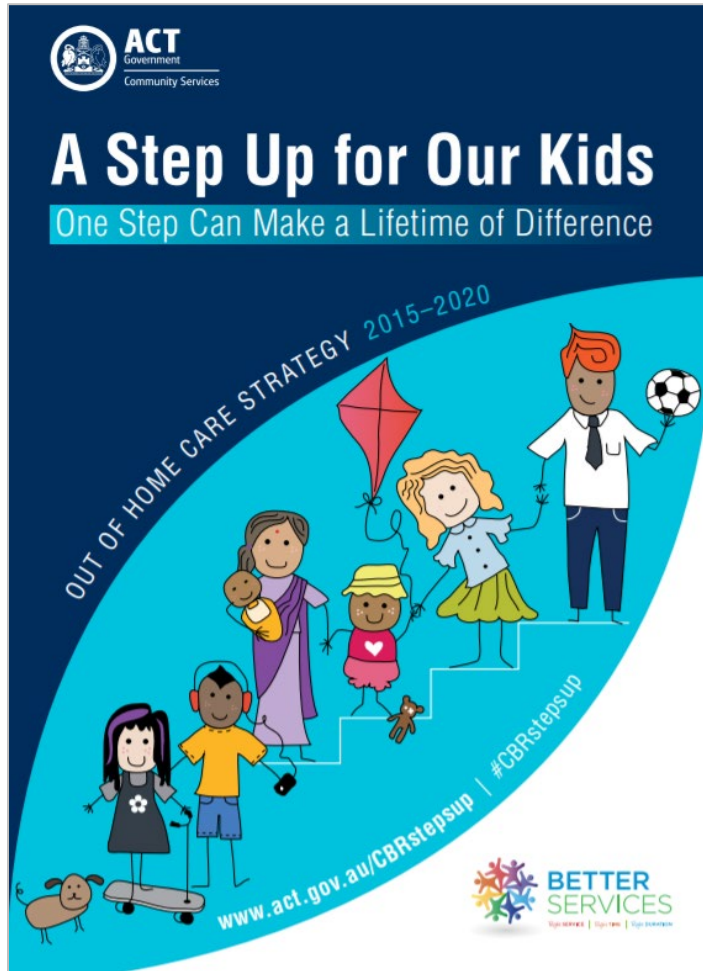
Keeping children and young people with biological families

Reunifying children and young people with their biological families as quickly as possible

Ensuring children and young people are able to grow up in secure, loving and permanent homes



# A Step Up for Our Kids 2015-2020



The reforms under the Strategy were broadly categorised into:

1. Strengthening High-Risk Families
2. Creating a Continuum of Care
3. Strengthening Accountability and Ensuring a High Functioning Care System



## The next step for *A Step Up for Our Kids*

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- The ACT Government is progressing reforms to the Child and Family Services System to improve the wellbeing of children, young people and their families. These reforms include improving outcomes for children, young people and families in child protection, youth justice and out of home care.
- The Community Services Directorate is developing the next stage of the ACT Government's out of home care strategy that will provide a platform for an improved service system for the next ten years.
- The next stage of *A Step Up for Our Kids* beyond 2022 will continue to build on the reform to date. Improving outcomes for children, young people and families where they are vulnerable and at risk will remain the priority.
- The next stage will be informed by what we have heard and learnt over the five years of reform, including our National and Territory commitments.

# A RANGE OF REFORMS

• IN ACT CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES •

GOVERNMENT & COMMUNITY SECTOR SUPPORTS

TERTIARY & STATUTORY SERVICES

LEGISLATIVE  
REFORM

**Modernise** the *Children and Young People Act 2008*.  
e.g. clarify legislative provisions to improve information  
sharing practices.

POLICY  
REFORM

Embed **early support** across the service system.

**A Step up for our Kids v2.**

Develop a **best start** strategy.

**A Blueprint for Youth Justice v2.**

Implement the recommendations from the **Royal Commission into Institutional responses to Child Sexual Abuse**.

Implement the full intent of the **Our Booris Our Way** review.

E.g. Implement the **Child Safe Standards** across all services.

PRACTICE  
CHANGE

**Empower families to have a voice** in decisions that affect them. E.g. develop a  
**charter of rights** for families of children involved in care and protection services.

Embed a **restorative approach** across all  
services involving children and families.

Improve **transparency and community trust** in  
the child protection  
system. E.g. develop a  
model of **external  
merits review** for child  
and youth protection  
services.

Strengthen existing  
services for at-risk  
young people. E.g. **Safe  
and Connected Youth**.

E.g. strengthen **functional family  
therapy** to better support families to  
find solutions that work for them.

SERVICE  
AND SYSTEM  
CHANGE

Service system reform to enable the ACT to successfully **raise the minimum age of criminal  
responsibility**. E.g. commission services to respond to the needs of children and young people who would  
otherwise be involved in or receive services through the youth justice system.

E.g. fully embed the **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child  
Placement Principle** across legislation, policy, and practice.

Apply the **Wellbeing Framework** to identify and measure outcomes  
and determine investment strategies.

Support delivery of the **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander  
Agreement**, children and young people core area.

# *A Step Up for Our Kids – Shifts and challenges*

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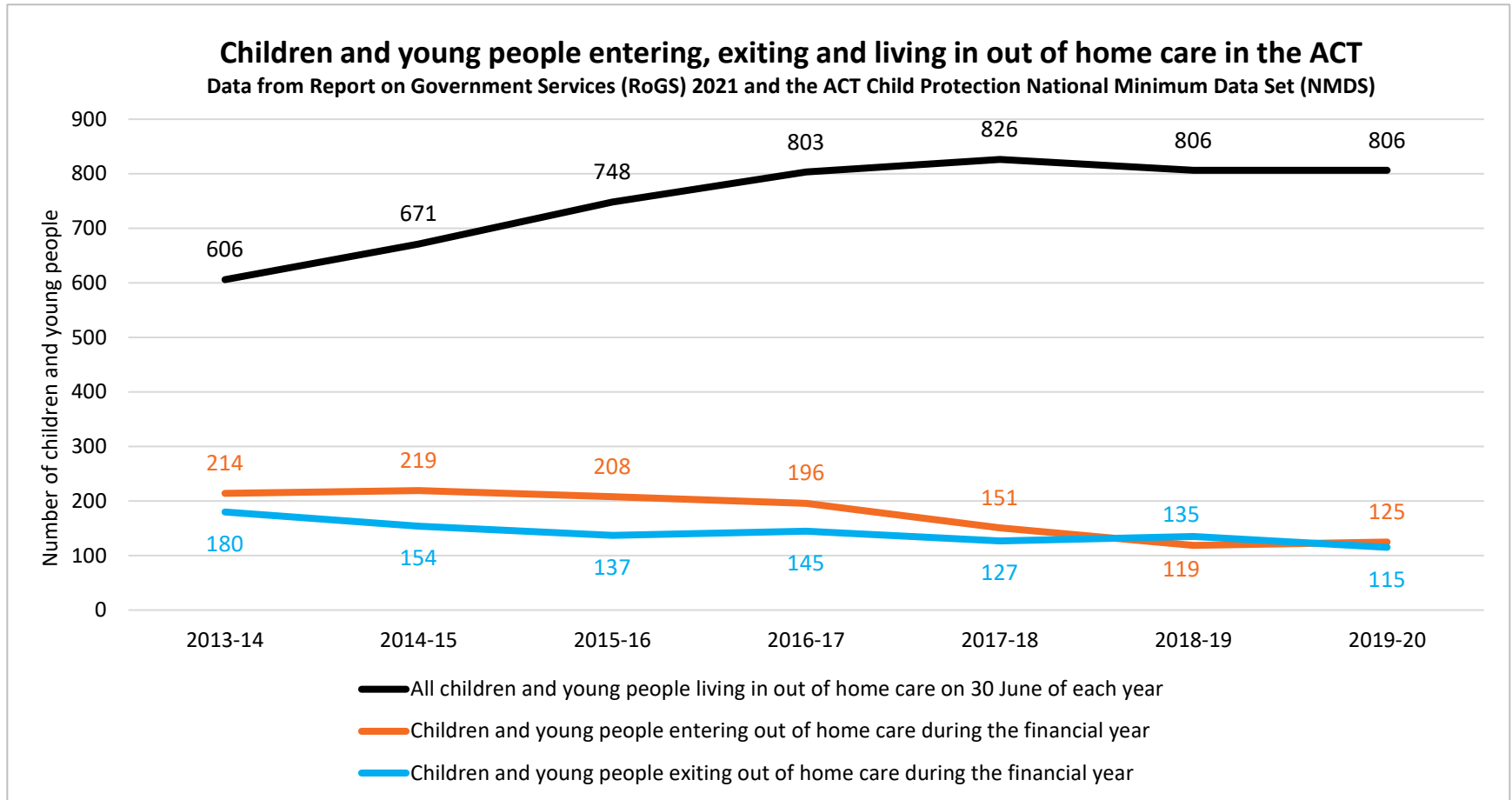
Data from the past five years shows:

- An increase in the number of children, young people and families receiving Intensive Family Support Services.
- A decrease in the number of children and young people entering and living in out of home care in the ACT, especially for young children.
- Similar numbers of children and young people leaving out of home care each year.
- Nearly half of all children and young people in out of home care living with their families in kinship care placements.
- An increase in the average age, and the behavioural complexity and support needs, of children and young people living in out of home care.
- Increased prevalence of domestic and family violence in Child Concern Reports.



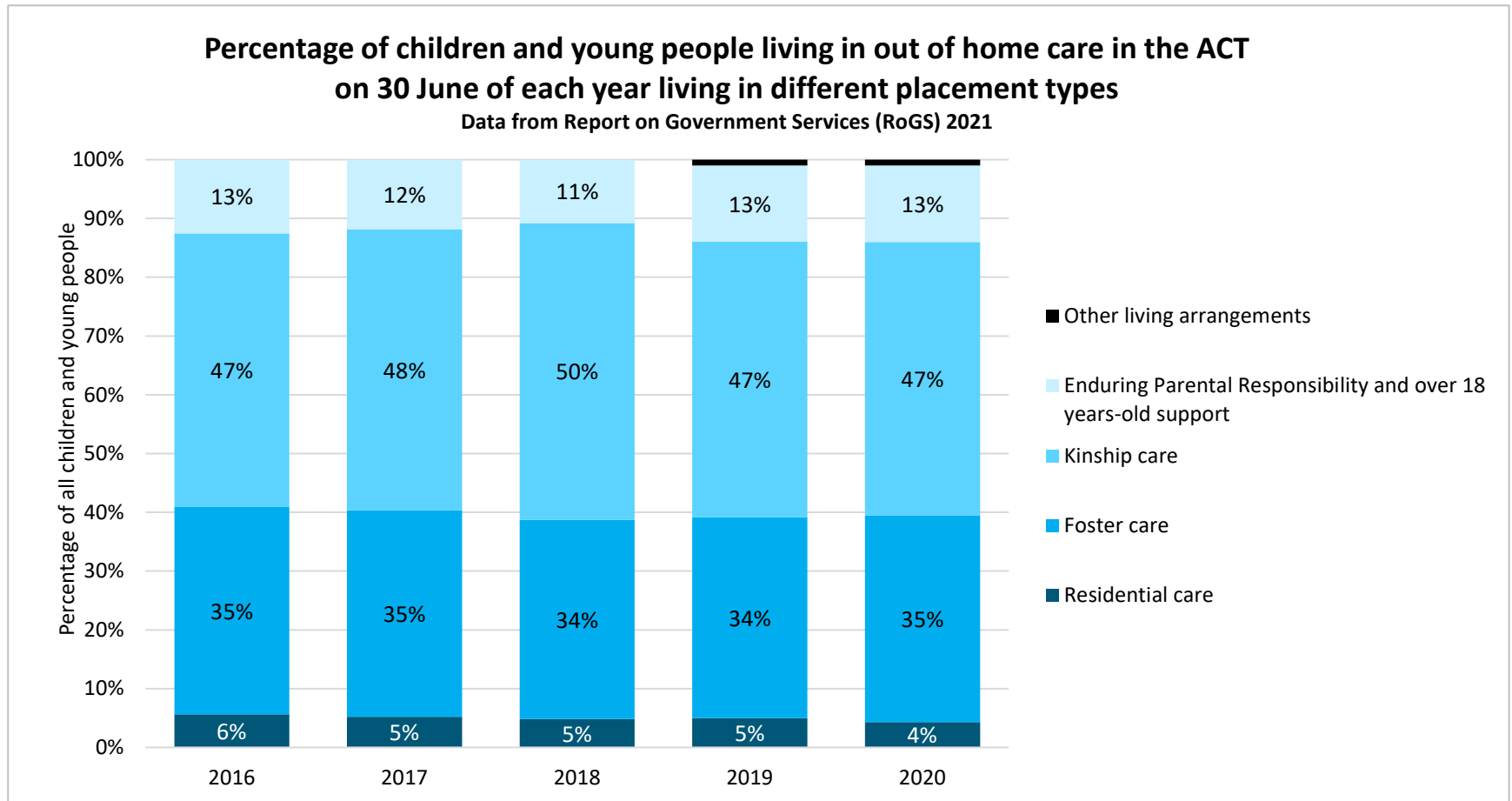
# Changes in the numbers of children and young people entering and living in out of home care

A decrease in the number of children and young people entering and living in out of home care in the ACT, especially for young children. Similar numbers of children and young people leaving out of home care each year.



# Changes in the types of out of home care placements children and young people are living in

Nearly half of all children and young people in out of home care live with their families in kinship care placements.



## A Step Up for Our Kids – Challenges

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Significant challenges remain for the ACT out of home care system. The most pressing of these being the continued over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Other challenges, which impact both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children and young people, include:

- continued need for family finding and reunification, to increase the numbers of children and young people who reconnect with their family through a movement into kinship care, or through leaving the out of home care system
- continued need for timely permanent alternative family arrangements for children and young people living in out of home care
- increasing behavioural complexity and support needs of children and young people who are living in out of home care
- gaps in educational and other life outcomes for children and young people living in and leaving out of home care.

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

## – Shifts and challenges

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- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people continue to be over-represented in the ACT child protection system, constituting 30 per cent of all children and young people living in out of home care.
- More needs to be done to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to remain living safely at home with their families and to reunify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people living in out of home care with their families.
- Our highest priority for service reform is to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families.



# Moving forward with *A Step Up for Our Kids* for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

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The ACT Government has committed to:

- The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement* (2019 – 2028).  
This agreement sets out the long-term direction in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs in the ACT.
- Full implementation of the recommendations of the *Our Booris, Our Way* Review.
- Independent, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led oversight of the implementation of this review through the *Our Booris, Our Way* Implementation Oversight Committee.
- Continued support for the *Family Group Conferencing* and *Functional Family Therapy* programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.
- Support for new Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.
- Embedding the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle* across sectors.
- Greater support for kinship carers.

# Moving forward with *A Step Up for Our Kids* for all families – The next stage

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Following five years of implementation, the next stage has a focus on:

- Achieving a partnering approach to decision-making with families, parents and carers.
- Earlier support to families to divert them from the care and protection system.
- Restoration of children back to family where it is safe to do so.
- Better support for carers to ensure children and young people have safe, loving and secure homes when they cannot return to their family.
- Transitions for young people leaving care, and moving between difficult life events.
- Better support for carers.
- Supporting children and people in the youth justice system and at risk of entering the youth justice system.

# Moving forward with *A Step Up for Our Kids* for all families – We'll be informed by...

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The next stage of the Strategy will be informed by the ACT Government's commitments to:

- *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*
- *National Out of Home Care Standards*
- *National Agreement to Closing the Gap (2020)*
- *The Future of Education 2019-2029*
- *Blueprint for Youth Justice in the ACT (2012-2022)*
- *Disability Justice Strategy (2019-2029)*
- *ACT Wellbeing Framework (2020)*
- *Restorative Cities Initiative*
- A Human Rights framework

# Moving forward with *A Step Up for Our Kids* for all families – Reform aims

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We know that all human service systems need to evolve, stay contemporary, and listen to the people who interact with it.

To achieve a service system that truly supports wellbeing for all children and young people, we need to regularly evaluate how government and community sector organisations work together to achieve shared goals.

The aim of the reforms to the Child and Family Services System are to:

- build on evidence about how children and young people are doing in the ACT.
- be informed and shaped by extensive consultation with families, the community sector and government stakeholders.
- provide a collective, shared agenda to support everyone to do well, and for children and their families to thrive.
- deliver through a restorative approach, with practice, system, and service changes – not just new programs.



## Listening Reports at *YourSay*

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- The Stage One *Listening Report* provides an overview of views and feedback from stakeholders – both from previous and recent engagement activities – over the life of the Strategy.
- To view the report and keep up to date on our stakeholder engagement to develop the next iteration of *A Step Up for Our Kids* go online to [\*YourSay – A Step Up for Our Kids\*](#)
- A Stage Two *Listening Report* is also being developed and will be available on *YourSay* later this year to ensure we capture the experience of a diversity of stakeholders.

## Further information

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For further information:

- Visit the [A Step Up for Our Kids](#) website
- See regular reporting via our [Snapshot Reporting](#)
- Email us at [cbrstepsup@act.gov.au](mailto:cbrstepsup@act.gov.au)