

- opportunities for children and young people to realise their personal goals and ambitions;
- improved quality of care for children and young people in care.

For their carers and service providers...

- positive and effective relationships with children and young people who they must help and advocate on behalf;
- hearing what children and young people feel and think and being able to make informed choices about work practice;
- collaborating with children and young people in care and other stakeholders to ensure the delivery of quality care services.

For our corporate and community partners...

- to contribute as informed and educated corporate citizens;
- participating in contributing to the long term development of solutions for children and young people in care;
- supporting children and young people to help themselves and each other.

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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE — THE CONFERENCE CONNECTION

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INTERVIEW WITH ANDY

Name: Andy

Age: 18

Where'd yer come from: ACT (Australian Capital Territory)

The general setting for Andy's interview is very relaxed. We are sitting in the chill out/meeting room that has been allocated for youth delegates and support workers that are staying at St Hildas accommodation facility here on Melbourne Campus. It is currently in a bit of a ... mess one could politely say (if they wanted to be polite that is).

Andy is an extremely articulate young man who, to me, seems to have the most amazing ability to read a situation. I thought that if I was given the opportunity to talk with him, I would most certainly take it up. And so, with the lure of a Mars bar and my easy acceptance, this is where we are.

I feel that Andy and I have a special bond. Of the brain one could say. I like the lad ... It is the sort of bond that one acquires after an evening of drunken socialism.

Lou: So ... Andy, who are you representing while you are here at the IFCO conference? Who are you? What are you?

Andy: I'm representing the A-Team.

Lou: What is the A-Team?

Andy: It's a group of young people from all over Australia who are in care, and were given the task of putting together a production for the opening ceremony of IFCO ... with the help of Genevieve and Kate ... last names unknown ... (at time of questioning) *giggles*

Lou: I just want to tell people, Andy, that you made me write that.

Andy: *laughter*

Lou: What did you find good about the conference?

Andy: I went to a really good workshop, that was REALLY GOOD!

Lou: *Lou looks expectantly at Andy and then realizes that she may need to be a prompter* OK so it was Gooooooood. What was it about?

Andy: It focused on how we see ourselves in the 20th century. We wrote down all these words we associate with the 20th century, like technology, internet, pollution ... you know ... Blah, blah ... and then we discussed the good and the bad points, and then did a performance around it.

Lou: *Lou then slaps her forehead* And what was it called? (Bit late heh?)

Andy: Dunno what it was called. *Lou then slaps her forehead yet again*

Lou: And who facilitated?

Andy: Some chick (with wrinkles). *Andy grins pathetically and says* Isn't this in a book somewhere ... Well Fran was in it ... I love Fran.

Ylleyna: (offsider who tagged along for the Mars Bar inspired interview) I love Fran, I love Clare, I love them both.

Lou: Did you go to any other workshops?

Andy: No I slept.

Lou: But you said that you went to two workshops? *Lou here raises her eyebrows accusingly*

Andy: Yea, but it was embarrassing, I don't want to talk about it. I'm repressing, leave me alone.

Lou: OK ... so what was the other one called ... at least give me that?

Andy: Dunno, it was another drama one.

Lou: Dunno - I'm inclined to think that you are trying to steal my favourite and most used saying ... so tell me then who facilitated this workshop?

Andy: Dunno ... *cheekily grins* Some guy with little hair, and a little croney called Jacob.

Lou: Was it good?

Andy: Nuh.

Lou: Why was it embarrassing?

Andy: Because I was with Amy and she looks like a troll ...

Lou: *feigns shocked horror and gasps* Is that why you were embarrassed?

Andy: *giggles pathetically* No... no... Some people in our group were unenthusiastic and it made it very difficult to do anything productive.

Lou: OK ... and the moral is ... So Andy was there anything else good about the conference? ...the food perhaps? *Andy begins to look pale.* The accommodation maybe? *Andy now is turning green ...*

Andy: *then decides to interrupt me before I have the chance to continue* The people with accents, they were good.

Lou: So Andy, through the good ... and the bad ... and the REALLY GOOD ... there has to have been something that you won't ever forget, you know ... just those one or two moments that will stay with you forever. What are those moments for you?

Andy: The standing ovation that we received after our opening ceremony performance.

Lou: How'd that make yer feel ... REALLY good ... I bet!!

Andy: Yea... *giggles* Like I was loved.

Lou: Admired?

Andy: Yeah *cackle* like I was king of the world.

Lou: So with such an amazing feeling ... do you think that you will want to go to the next IFCO conference?

Andy: OK

Lou: That wasn't an invitation... *Lou grins* Yer a cheeky bugga aren't yer ... So Andy I'd say that this is almost the end of whatever it may be that we have just done, is there anything else that you would like to add - you know ... for the record?

Andy: Yeah, Melbourne weather sux! And I've just come from Canberra, so that says something.

Lou: Oh ... and you know before we stop ... officially the interview, I think that it might make me sound better if I ask where you are headed now with the A-Team?

Andy: Dunno.

Lou: Alrighty then ... this has been most productive wouldn't yer say ... Any last words?

Andy: Nahhhh.

Lou: Do you want yer Mars Bar now?

Andy: Yes please ...

Lou: Well thank you with all the cactusesin the world Andy ...

Andy: It was fun, we should do it again sometime ...

Louella Pettit

The A-Team in action at the IFCO conference



WHY IS IT SOOOO TRENDY TO HAVE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE AT CONFERENCES?

A couple of years ago it became very hip to have children and young people in care attend conferences that used to be attended by predominantly – adults. Not just any old adults ... clever, well-educated, out-for-a-good-time peoples!! We want to hear the voice of consumers. Tell us what we are doing right. Tell us what we are doing wrong. Tell us all of your deepest, most private stories. Tell us, complete strangers, of your experiences. We want to know how you feel. We want to know why you behave the way you do. What makes you tick?

Young people in care are now being invited to all sorts of events in all sorts of places.

I remember when a group of young Australians in care went to an international conference in Dublin – the Aussies were the only young people there! The conference was sooo out of touch with young people's needs that the Aussies were given a room full of chairs stuck to the floor to run a creative interactive workshop on consumer participation!

A year later some more young Aussies in care attended another international conference – this time they were given more opportunities to connect with and enjoy other young people in care from around the world. Still missing the 'real' integrated feeling.

At another conference they were given a lot of airplay – everyone heard their message. Still nothing super duper and amazing.

One conference they were on the planning committee, gave amazing input and ideas, were nodded at and dismissed. This same conference, they were the 'helpers' showing people where the toilet was and how to get to their next workshop!

Children and young people in care are experts when it comes to 'care issues'. We know because we live it. Every day. Every night.

HOW CAN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE BE SEEN AND HEARD AT CONFERENCES?

If you want to have young people seen and heard at a conference or gathering, here are some suggestions:

Briefing for conference mentors: have funky briefing materials that go out to delegates before the event.

Buddies: match people up with someone who they know is their 'buddy' for the duration of the conference.

Support groups: invite people to be part of a support group that meets throughout the day to touch base on what's working for people and what's not.

Optional youth only components: make some stuff for young people only.

Roving reporters: have young people covering the event and publishing a daily newsletter.

Platform: give children and young people adequate time and space to speak and perform formally each day of the event.

Planning: young people may well want to be invited from the very beginning, ask them.

Joint presentations: call for papers and workshops to be developed and presented by children and young people and adults in partnership.

Co chairs of plenaries & workshops: why not have children and young people in the more formal roles of events.

Feedback: actively seek feedback from children and young people.

Debrief: have strategies in place for the big debrief after an event.

Organisations bring young people: this way children and young people will already be connected with someone and feel good about being part of an organisation's delegation.

Social: ask young people to run a social event – that adults turn up to!

Space: give children and young people space to chill out during the event – 24hrs!

Integration: encourage workshops and presentations to be interesting, informative, interactive and FUN!

Language: use easy to understand words and pictures.

Connecting: provide opportunities for children and young people to connect with each other and the 'adult' delegates.

Whoa! That's just a few - we could go on for ever! All of these strategies require adequate support and resources, including people, money, time and 'things'.

Best wishes and good luck for a most excellent and successful event!

Please write to IFZ and share your experiences of conferences and events that you have been invited to ... and any handy hints that you may have to offer people thinking of having children and young people in care at their next event!

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