

SUMMARY REPORT OF THE
NON GOVERNMENT COMMUNITY SECTOR
CHILDREN AT RISK REPORTS
CHILD PROTECTION SERVICE SURVEY 3

Prepared by

NARELLE PATTERSON

PROJECT OFFICER

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND RESEARCH PROGRAM

UNITINGCARE BURNSIDE

PHONE: (02) 9768 6861

E-MAIL: npatterson@burnside.org.au

on behalf of the coalition of child and family agencies and peak welfare organisations

CHILDREN AT RISK SURVEY 3 SUMMARY REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Presented below is a summary of the findings of the Children at Risk Survey 3, conducted in May – July of this year. Copies of the full report are available through the Social Justice and Research Program, UnitingCare Burnside. Thank you to all the people who participated in the survey. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me, Narelle Patterson, UnitingCare Burnside.

SURVEY DESCRIPTION

The purpose of this final survey was to gather information about:

- What action is taken once the report is made
- The level and quality of feedback received after making a report
- Whether the problems identified in previous surveys continue to exist

The auspicing organisations were:

- UnitingCare Burnside
- ACWA
- FSSA
- YAA
- WRM
- NCOSS

Number of Surveys Analysed

Youth Accommodation Association	32
Family Support Services Association Burnside	26
ACWA	52
Womens Refuge Movement	43
	67

Total Number of Surveys Analysed 220¹

Number of Children involved

Children aged 5 or less	182	Children aged between 6-10	103
▪ Under 12 months	(39)	Children aged eleven plus	120
▪ 1 – 3 years	(89)	No stated ages	11
▪ 4 – 5 years	(54)		

One hundred and twelve (50.9%) of the surveys analysed involved at least one child 5 years old and under.

Total Number of Children

416

¹ Ten reports were unable to be used as they were filled in incorrectly/unreadable or the wrong survey was returned

CHILDREN AT RISK SURVEY 3 SUMMARY REPORT

KEY STATISTICS

Worker Assessment of Report	
▪ Requiring action in 24hrs	89
▪ Requiring action within a week	75
▪ Requiring action but can wait more than a week	40
▪ Not indicated	16

Requiring Action within 24hrs

CONTACTED BY DOCS

Of the 89 Reports that indicated the worker believed action was required within 24 hours 40 **(44.9%)** indicated that contact was made by a CSC caseworker.

Of these 40 reports:

- 27 (67.5%) had a response within 24hours
- 13 (32.5%) had a response after 24 hours ranging from 2 days to 4 weeks.
(3 within 2 days; 4 within 4-7 days; 1 within 2 weeks and 1 within 4 weeks)

NOT CONTACTED BY DOCS

Of the 89 Reports that indicated the worker believed action was required within 24 hours 31 **(34.9%)** indicated that there was no contact made by a CSC caseworker. 13 (42%) of these non-contacts came from the DoCS Northern Region.

Of these 31 reports:

- 20 (65%) had no contact with a caseworker and did not follow up the situation.
- 11 (35%) contacted DoCS again after they had not been contacted by a caseworker.

NOT ANSWERED

Of the 89 Reports that indicated the worker believed action was required within 24 hours 18 **(20.2%)** did not indicate whether they were contacted by DoCS or not.

Requiring Action within 1 Week

CONTACTED BY DOCS

Of the 75 reports that indicated the worker believed action was required within 1 week, 36 **(48%)** were contacted by a DoCS caseworker.

Of these 36 reports:

- 26 (72%) received a response from DoCS within 1 week
- 4 (11%) waited between 1 week and 3 ½ weeks for a response
- 6 (17%) did not indicate the timeframe in which contact occurred

NOT CONTACTED BY DOCS

Of the 75 reports that indicated the worker believed action was required within 1 week, 26 **(35%)** were not contacted by a DoCS caseworker. 14 (54%) of these non-contacts came from the DoCS Northern Region.

NOT ANSWERED

Of the 75 Reports that indicated the worker believed action was required within 1 week 13 **(17.3%)** did not indicate whether they were contacted by DoCS or not

CHILDREN AT RISK SURVEY 3 SUMMARY REPORT

Summary of Contact with CSC after reporting

▪ Contacted by a CSC since making the report	91 (41%)
▪ Made own contact with CSC	23 (10%)
▪ No contact with CSC	64 (29%)
▪ Not indicated on survey return	42 (19%)

Helpline Waiting Time²

Thirty minutes or less	101	(77.7%)
Greater than thirty minutes	29	(22.3%)

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Action Taken Once the Report is Made

It was found that there are still significant issues relating to action taken once a report was made. These included: Helpline waiting times; receiving feedback from Community Service Centres (CSC); disparity between Helpline and CSC assessment of reports; problems with system processes such failure to provide faxed acknowledgments and report numbers. These issues make it difficult for direct service workers to track their report once it is in the DoCS 'system'.

2. The level and quality of feedback received after making a report

In this survey, as in previous surveys, the level and quality of feedback from both Helpline and Community Service Centres (CSC) was found to be problematic. The issues included: making contact with a Helpline caseworker, receiving contact from a CSC caseworkers; assessment of Helpline and/or CSC caseworkers differing significantly from that of the NGO service provider; reporter resorting to alternative ways of getting action because the established system for making a report had failed eg. going directly to a CSC, JIRT, re-reporting³.

3. Continuation of the problems identified in previous surveys

Overall the problems identified in previous surveys do still exist although there have been some system improvements such as reduced waiting times and the capacity to leave messages and receive a callback. However, fundamental issues around efficiency and effectiveness remain. Issues around the difficulties in working in partnership with the Department as colleagues and child protection experts were also raised.

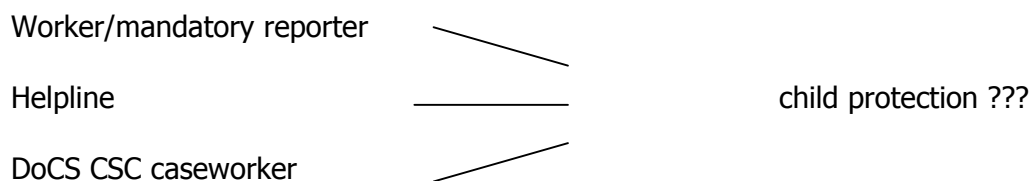
² 130 (59%) answered this question. The remainder either did not state how long they waited on the phone, or they left a message, called back later or faxed a report.

³ Respondents however saw re-reporting as a poor alternative because reporting hadn't worked the first time.

CHILDREN AT RISK SURVEY 3 SUMMARY REPORT

CONCLUSION

- The child protection system has three tiers of assessment, all using different tools and different time frames



- The current reporting system does not relate back to the field, ie. those who see and work directly with the most vulnerable on a daily basis and in range of capacities
- Survey revealed significant problems in the interagency work and collaboration between the three 'players', Helpline, CSC and NGOs. These problems mean that it is difficult for the system to achieve its stated aim of protecting children. In particular NGOs are receiving conflicting messages about their role in the process.
- NGOs are integral to an effective and efficient child protection system but remain largely ignored in the child protection process as having a strategic role. Workers are placed in a difficult position as mandatory reporters and client advocates. For example, giving information to DoCS about people and then having no control or collaborative input and then often no knowledge over what is done with that information
- With the introduction of Helpline some workers in the field have expressed concerns about the difficulties in establishing direct links with caseworkers in Community Service Centres. This was further highlighted by the expressed advantages of being able to resolve issues of child protection more quickly by services that are funded to work directly with CSC caseworkers and only receive referrals from CSC caseworkers.
- The establishment of Helpline doesn't appear to have 'helped'. Children too often remain in situations where they are at risk. This raises the question: *Is this a child protection system or information gathering/"intelligence" gathering system?*