



Coalition for Children in Care Transition Plan for the delivery of out-of-home care services by Non-Government Organisations

Context and rationale

In November 2008, Justice James Wood released his final report in relation to the Special Commission of Inquiry in to Child Protection in NSW. One of the key recommendations (16.2) of the report was that out-of-home care services should be provided by the non-government sector. This reaffirmed the findings of previous inquiries in to the out-of-home care system held in 1991/2 (Usher Review) and 2000 (Community Services Commission, Fitzgerald) both of which highlighted the need to address weaknesses in the system and to separate the statutory function of child protection from the provision of services and support to children once they have come in to care.

NSW now has a window of opportunity to re-make the service system for those children who are unable to live at home. It should be a system that is more child-focused, that is grounded in what we now understand as good practice and quality care, that is planned rather than crisis driven, and that promotes good outcomes for children whilst in care and in to the future.

What exists currently is a system that is crisis driven, is secondary to a child protection system that is under pressure, and is jeopardised by slow court processes and disjointed casework practice that work against early restoration. Out-of-home care is growing in NSW at a rate much higher than in other states, with a 16% per annum increase between 05/06 and 07/08, and a rate 10 per thousand of the child population. While Aboriginal children have always been massively overrepresented in the system, they now make up 34% of all children in out-of-home care in NSW compared to 3.4% of the child population. Stress on the system mostly derives from the increasing lengths of stay in care, with children in kinship care (now 57% of the care population) averaging over 5 years in care.

NSW has the building blocks in place to make a better Out-of-Home Care system. Community Services have developed a good case management policy that clearly outlines roles and responsibilities; the standards and accreditation system developed by the Office of the Children's Guardian has brought a focus on quality care and an improved monitoring system; NGOs have experience and the expertise to deliver good outcomes for children; Brighter Futures provides support services to assist in keeping children out of the care system and support families better; and there is a focus on permanency in both NSW legislation and practice to underpin case planning.

A good transition plan will take what is working now and develop new measures to ensure that we don't simply replicate the old system, but build a new one that aims to:

- Meet established standards
- Provide new pathways through the out-of-home care system
- Provide clarity of roles and responsibilities
- Improve restoration rates
- Increase the number of placements based on permanency planning principles, including adoptions
- Result in good outcomes for children who experience time in care

Transition Objective:

To provide high quality services and supports to children who are unable to live at home through a system that is child focused, planned and well-resourced.

Overarching Principles:

1. The Out-of-Home Care system should conform to the principles set out in the Wood Report:

16.465 Children and young persons both entering and in care should be heard and should participate in decisions affecting them.

16.466 Decisions and actions should be based on an understanding of how they will affect the children and young persons, particularly in relation to their safety, well-being and development.

16.467 Children and young persons require a stable foundation from which their relationships, identity, values, and cultural awareness can develop.

16.468 Continuity of attachment ties is essential for the overall development of a young child, and when children and young persons are separated from their birth families, stable foundations must be re-established as soon as possible either with their birth family or with an alternative long term carer or family.

16.469 Early decision making about permanency planning, including restoration to family, results in better outcomes for children and young persons, both in immediate terms and for life after care.

16.470 All Aboriginal children and young persons in OOHC should be connected to their family and their community, while addressing their social, emotional and cultural needs.

16.471 Children and young persons should be assisted to gain regular access to education, health and other services to meet their changing needs and to enable them to grow and develop.

16.472 Carers should actively participate in decision making in relation to children and young persons in their care.

2. OOHC services should be planned and provided as close as possible to a child's community.

3. Aboriginal children should be placed with and supported by Aboriginal agencies
4. Stability should be maintained for those children already in care
5. Children, young people and their carers should be kept informed about and engaged in the transition process.
6. NGOs should deliver all out-of-home care services. Case management should be provided by NGOS for all children in care.