

# KINSHIP CARE FORUM 21 FEBRUARY 2011

Annette Gallard – Chief Executive, Community Services

## Introduction



- Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. I congratulate the Coalition for Children in Care for hosting this important forum.
- I would like to start by acknowledging the original custodians, the *Eora* people, on whose land we are meeting today. I would also like to pay my respects to Elders past and present, and welcome all Aboriginal people here with us today.

- Those relatives and kin who take on the care of related children are to be applauded for what they do. These grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings and close friends are providing an invaluable service to the children in their care, their families and the whole community.
- Without these amazing people who rise to the challenge of caring for children... the out-of-home care system would simply fall over.

## Children and young people in OOHC by placement type, NSW at 30 June 2010

Placement Type	No.	%
Relative & Aboriginal Kinship Care	8,844	50.8
Foster Care	6,703	38.5
Non related person	186	1.1
Parents	980	5.6
Residential Care	410	2.4
Independent Living	200	1.1
Supported Accommodation	77	0.4

Source: Community Services Annual Statistical Report 2009/10

### What we know from the data

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- At 30 June 2010, there were 17,400 children and young people in out-of-home care in NSW. 8,844 or 50.8% were in relative or kinship placements.
- Of these children and young people 3, 581 were in statutory relative care placements as at 30 June 2010.
- These are placements where a relative or kin is caring for a child or young person in the parental responsibility of the Minister following an order of the Children's Court.

- 5,263 children and young people were in relative/kinship supported care placements as at 30 June 2010.
- These are predominantly placements where there are no court orders and relative and kin have accepted the care of the child or young person after an assessment that the child or young person is in need of care and protection.
- These figures do not include private family arrangements involving relatives caring for related children and young people where there are no assessed child protection concerns. It is appropriate that the legislative and regulatory framework that governs out-of-home care in NSW does not apply to these arrangements.

Percentage of children in OOHC, by type of placement, states & territories, 30 June 2010 (Source: AIHW Report – Child Protection Australia 2009-2010)

Type of placement	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA(a)	SA(b)	Tas(c)	ACT	NT	Total
Foster care	41.5	40.8	59.8	46.3	46.3	50.8	41.2	45.6	46.1
<b>Relatives/ kin</b>	<b>55.6</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>32.5</b>	<b>45.1</b>	<b>38.7</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>22.9</b>	<b>45.5</b>
Other home-based care	0	10.5	..	0	0.2	9.4	0	18.5	2.1
<i>Total home-based care</i>	<i>97.2</i>	<i>91.3</i>	<i>92.3</i>	<i>91.4</i>	<i>85.2</i>	<i>92.3</i>	<i>91.2</i>	<i>86.9</i>	<i>93.7</i>
Family group homes	..	0	..	2.3	0	2.1	..	4.4	0.3
Residential care	2.3	8.3	7.7	5.3	9.9	2.2	8.8	1.1	5.1
Independent living	0.5	0.4	..	0.9	1.3	0	0	0.7	0.4
Other/unknown	—	—	..	—	3.7	3.4	0	6.9	0.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>								

- National comparisons show that NSW has more children placed in relative and kinship care than any other Australian jurisdiction.

## Characteristics of Relative and Kinship carers

### *More likely than foster carers to be:*

- Older
- Lower incomes
- Reliant on Centrelink income support
- In public rental accommodation

### *Less likely than foster carers to be:*

- Employed
- Have a University qualification

Source: Social Policy Research Centre Report 2010 – *Financial and non-financial support to formal and informal carers*

## What the research tells us

- We know from the research that kinship carers are overwhelmingly female, older than the foster carer population; more likely to have lower incomes and to be in public rental accommodation. They are also less likely than foster carers to be employed, or to have a University qualification.
- From the research we know that kinship carers are more likely than foster carers to be reliant on Centrelink income support. They are also more likely to be single and have poorer health than non-kinship carers.
- We also know that relative and kinship carers make great personal sacrifices to take on the care of related children. For

many older relative and kinship carers, retirement plans, recreational activities and friendships are put on hold when they take on the role of parenting a young relative.

- As well as the additional financial burdens, frictions can emerge in the broader family when relatives assume the care of a related child due to abuse or neglect. These carers must also manage their own feelings of disappointment and grief while trying to meet the needs of a child who is experiencing their own trauma and loss.
- Despite the challenges, relative and kin carers also report great rewards from raising child relatives – these flow from the deep satisfaction of keeping the family together and knowing that the children are safe, well cared for and loved.
- Most importantly, however, the sacrifices that relative and kin carers make to care for related children and young people materially improve the wellbeing of these children and young people.

## Reasons for placing children with relative or kin

Critical factors in child development (security and attachment) are promoted in relative and kinship care placements

Source: Outcomes for children and young people in kinship care, Marina Paxman, Community Services 2006

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- Studies show that placing children with family members is less stressful and will help to maintain family ties and promote cultural connections and identity. Other positive aspects of kinship placements include greater placement stability, stronger attachment to carers, a deeper sense of belonging and feeling safe and secure. These are all critical markers of wellbeing and positive child development.

### **Placement of Aboriginal children and young people**

- Placement with relative and kin is of particular importance for Aboriginal children and young people given the devastating

impact that past government policies and practices have had on Aboriginal families and communities, and which led to what we now know as the Stolen Generations.

- On the recommendation of the 1997 Bringing Them Home Report, agencies are now required to place Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care in accordance with the Aboriginal Child and Young Person Placement Principles that are enshrined in NSW in the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*.
- These Principles aim to maintain and promote Aboriginal children and young peoples' connection to their Aboriginal family and cultural identity.
- They outline a hierarchy of placement options for Aboriginal children and young people with the priority placement being with extended family or kin.

## Percentage of Aboriginal children and young people in relative or kin placements in NSW

- 59.7% of the 5,788 Aboriginal children and young people in OOHC were in relative or kin placements.

Source: Community Services Annual Statistical Report 2009/10

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- As at 30 June 2010, 59.7% of Aboriginal children and young people in OOHC were in relative and kinship placements.
- It is not always an easy process to locate members of an Aboriginal child's extended family or kinship group..... it can be hard for caseworkers to even know where to begin. This is why Community Services funds Link-Up, NSW's Family Link Service.
- The Family Link Service aims to identify relatives or kin of Aboriginal children and young people either entering or at risk of entering the OOHC system, so that children and young

people are placed in relative or kinship placements where available.

- In 2010/11 Community Services provided \$796,947 in renewable funding for the Family Link Service - \$126,830 of this funding is to provide a service to Community Service's Metro West Region and \$670,117 of this funding is to provide a state-wide service.

### **Placements must promote safety welfare and wellbeing**

- When placing a child or young person in out-of-home care the primary objective is to find a placement that will promote their safety, welfare and wellbeing.
- The *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* requires all statutory and supported carers to be authorised. Community Services requires all relative and kinship carers to be assessed prior to being authorised as a carer.

- Like foster carers, prospective relative/kinship carers must complete probity checks including a NSW Criminal Record check, a Working with Children check and KIDS record check in addition to a house safety check.
- Because relative and kin carers are generally being assessed to care for a specific child, the assessment process focusses on their relationship with the child or young person and the birth parents. It also looks at their willingness to participate in training and support groups and the level of support they may require in caring for the child or young person.
- The assessment of a relative and kin carer also takes into account the carer's experiences of being parented and previous experience of abuse, medical and psychiatric history, education and employment history, parenting skills and suitability of their home environment for the child or young person. Willingness to facilitate contact for the child or young person with their birth parents is also taken into account.
- Although foster carer training is not mandatory for relative and kin carers they are able to participate in carer training programs.

- Although relative and kinship placements are generally by far the preferred option for children and young people it is also important to acknowledge the difficulties that caseworkers sometimes face.....when a relative of a child makes themselves known.....and expresses interest in caring for a child long after that child has stabilised and created attachments in a foster family placement.
- In these challenging situations caseworkers have to delicately balance the needs of the child for stability and permanence with the option of moving the child to the care of their relative. Some children may for the first time finally feel settled and safe with their new foster family .....moving them may not be in their best interests.

### **Support for carers**

- As I mentioned earlier, we know from a number of studies that relative and kinship carers face very particular challenges when taking on the care of a related child.

- Understandably, many relative and kinship carers at times feel overwhelmed by the responsibility that they have taken on and need help and support to carry out their role.
- Community Services provides funding to Connecting Carers NSW, the Aboriginal Statewide Foster Carer Support Service and the Foster Parents Support Network to provide information and support to foster, relative and kinship carers across NSW.
- In June 2010, Connecting Carers received one-off funding of \$600,000 to develop resources and conduct training for all relative and kinship carers in NSW. This included \$84,000 to engage AbSec to assist with the development of the resources and training for Aboriginal relative and kinship carers.
- This financial year Absec was funded \$176,902 to provide Aboriginal foster and kinship carers with resources, information, referral services and local support networks to assist them to provide quality care for Aboriginal children and young people in care.

- They also received one-off funding of \$683,801 for the Aboriginal Peer Support Group Project to establish and maintain regional and rural peer support groups for Aboriginal foster and kinship carers.
- As well as information, referrals and training, we know that relative and kin carers want better access to financial supports to assist them in their caring role.
- It is important that relative and kin carers access the financial payments made by the Commonwealth Government to support Australian families. These payments include the Family Tax Benefit Part A and Part B and Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate.
- A recent study by the Social Policy Research Centre for the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs noted that formal and informal carers often experience difficulty in getting appropriate information about the Commonwealth payments to which they are entitled.

- This issue requires attention by both the Australian Government and its relevant agencies. As we are all aware, income support for families is primarily a Commonwealth responsibility. It is not in the best interests of families or the children they care for to bring them within the oversight of State-based child welfare agencies solely for the purpose of accessing financial assistance.
- Where child protection concerns do exist and have been assessed by Community Services, both statutory and supported relative and kinship carers are entitled to financial and other supports from the NSW Government.
- Community Services provides **formal** relative and kinship carers caring for children and young people within the statutory out-of-home care system with the same financial supports as foster carers. This includes payment of a care allowance at the same rate as other statutory carers.
- In addition, relative and kinship carers caring for a child or young person as a result of an order of the Children's Court are eligible for casework support, training, and financial assistance

with one-off expenses where this is part of the child's approved case plan.

- Community Services also provides a supported care allowance to **informal** relative and kinship carers caring for children and young people who have been assessed by Community Services as in need of care and protection.
- This means that the child is considered to be at risk of abuse or neglect of a significant nature if returned to the care of his or her parents.
- The supported care allowance paid in NSW to informal carers is equivalent to the allowance paid to statutory carers and is the most generous of any other jurisdiction in Australia.
- The decision to only provide an allowance to relative/kinship carers where the child is in need of care and protection is in line with recommendations of the Wood Special Commission of Inquiry and the directions outlined in *Keep them Safe*. It ensures that Community Services, as a child protection agency,

focuses its resources and efforts on those children who are most at risk.

- Currently the standard statutory and supported carer allowances are the same at \$413 per fortnight for each child aged 0-4, \$463 per fortnight for each child aged 5-13, and \$622 per fortnight for each child aged 14-17. If the child or young person has special needs than a higher allowance is paid.
- The allowances contribute towards the cost of looking after the child or young person including food, clothing, household maintenance, gifts, pocket money and entertainment.
- They are based on research published by the Social Policy Research Centre on the costs of raising a child.

### **National Child Protection Framework**

- Improving the supports available to formal and informal carers has been identified as a national priority under the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children....*

- As part of advancing this priority, the Social Policy Research Centre was commissioned by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs to conduct a research project on financial and non-financial supports to out-of-home carers. The project's objective was to explore the supports and services available to formal and informal out-of-home carers to analyse current gaps in support and build an understanding of carers' needs and priorities and the barriers to undertaking a caring role.
- The report has been endorsed by Community and Disability Services Ministers for public release and will guide future work on this priority action to be undertaken in partnership between the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments and the non-government sector.
- You will also be aware that Community and Disability Services Ministers recently endorsed a set of National Out-of-Home Care Standards that were developed under the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*.

- These standards include that carers are assessed and receive ongoing training, development and support, in order to provide quality care. Reporting by all States and Territories on how they are meeting the National Standards will commence progressively from 2012.
- Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and non-government stakeholders are currently working together to identify measures for each standard. A final set of measures will be considered by Ministers in April.

### **Ernst and Young caseload consultancy**

- Many of you would be aware of a recent review of OOHC caseloads undertaken by Ernst & Young for Community Services. The project was about building an evidence base about the changes Community Services needs to make to meet accreditation standards.
- This review was based on a survey of 255 OOHC caseworkers, covering 1,302 children and young people.

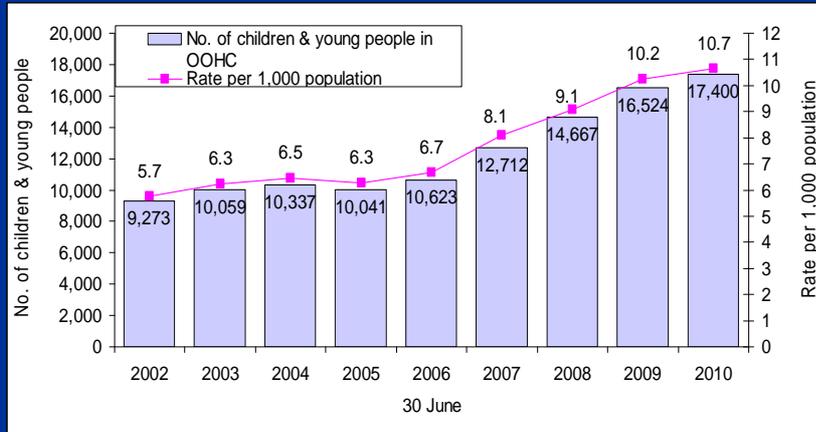
- All OOHC caseworkers were invited to participate.
- This review found that caseworker's time is prioritised according to a child or young person's individual characteristics and OOHC placement type.....for example caseworkers advised that casework activity time for children in residential placements and for children over 12 years of age is higher.....as is casework activity time for children and young people in statutory OOHC placements.
- The review concluded that caseworkers would need to lift the time they spent on children and young people in statutory OOHC by 40% if they are to meet the NSW OOHC standards administered by the Children's Guardian.
- Assuming the agency's accreditation requirements are to be met by 2013, the review recommended that caseloads be set at 13.5 for general foster care placements, 14.1 for statutory relative and kinship care placements and 20.8 for supported relative/kinship care placements.

- The higher caseloads proposed for relative and kin placements are supported by research findings about the greater stability of these placements and greater capacity of relative and kinship carers to maintain the child or young person's connection with family, community and kin.
- We also know from research findings that whilst relative and kin carers want better access to financial assistance and non-financial supports such as respite, information, referrals and advice, they do not welcome the scrutiny, monitoring and review that is applied to non-related foster carers.
- The 2009 University of Western Sydney study *Kinship Care in NSW – Finding a Way Forward* commission by ACWA found that relative and kin carers:

*were suspicious of regulatory supervision, feeling that in some way being 'observed', 'supervised' and 'assessed' was insulting to them as primary care givers, created a culture of blame and felt to them like being under surveillance.*

- The results of the Ernst and Young caseload consultancy will also inform the gradual transfer of OOHC to the non-government sector.
- The NSW Government is committed to transferring OOHC services to the non-government sector. The transition will take a number of years....to ensure that adequate planning and allocation of resources occurs in order to meet the additional demands that will be placed on non-government organisations.
- The transition may involve transferring existing children and young people and their carers to NGOs..... which would result in a significant transfer of responsibility. However it is expected that this would be easier for NGOs to achieve than new growth in capacity....as agencies would not need to recruit and train new carers.

## Children and young people in OOHC and rate per 1,000 population, 30 June 2002 to 30 June 2010



Source: Community Services Annual Statistical Report 2009/10

## Early Intervention and Prevention Services

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- It is important to remember that the first priority of any child protection system for children to live safely with their parents and avoid entry to out-of-home care. Sadly, the number of children and young people who need out of home care has continued to grow steadily over recent years. The number of children and young people in OOHC has risen from 9,273 as at 30 June 2002 to 17,400 as at 30 June 2010.
- Keeping families together requires access to early intervention and prevention services for families in crisis. These services prevent problems escalating to the point where child protection

intervention is required.....and out-of-home care becomes the only option to ensure the safety and wellbeing of their children.

- In recognition of the need for more early intervention and prevention services, in 2010, the NSW Government provided funding to expand the number of available places for families in the Brighter Futures Program by 200.
- Additionally, under *Keep Them Safe* the NSW Government has provided \$12.6 million dollars per annum over the next four years to establish a new Early Intervention and Prevention Placement Program.
- In conjunction with the Brighter Futures Program this program will result in a continuum of early intervention and prevention services providing targeted support services to families in need.
- It is anticipated that these additional early intervention and prevention services will be operating from mid-year.

## **Pathways of Care**

- There have been some valuable studies in recent years that have made an important contribution to our knowledge of relative and kinship care. Nevertheless, evidence about outcomes for children and young people in relative and kin placements remains limited. There are also very few studies on the long term social and emotional outcomes of relative and kin care.
- Community Services is undertaking *Pathways of Care*, a large-scale representative longitudinal study that will follow children and young people aged 0-17 years entering out-of-home care (OOHC) on Children's Court orders for the first time.
- The aim of the study is to provide the knowledge needed to strengthen the OOHC service system in NSW in order to improve the outcomes for children and young people in OOHC. These outcomes include children's and young people's permanency, safety, and wellbeing (including their physical health, socio-emotional and cognitive/learning development).

- Importantly, this study will help us understand the factors that influence the outcomes for children and young people who grow up in OOHC, including in relative and kinship placements.

## **Conclusion**

- Caring for children who have suffered abuse and/or neglect is not always an easy task. The contribution that relative and kinship carers provide to the out-of-home care system, and the difference they make in vulnerable children's lives is immeasurable.
- I have nothing but praise and admiration for these selfless volunteers.
- I would like to reaffirm Community Services commitment to working with stakeholders in both the government and non-government sector to provide relative and kinship carers .... and the children and young people in their care.....with the services and supports they need.