

Kinship Care Forum Notes 21 February 2011

Panel overview

Merilyn O'Neill and Paul Bickford, Grandparents as Parents Again (GAPA)

GAPA wants separate identity for kinship carers to OOHC. They argued for stability and consistency of support to kin carers – not to be at the whim of Government policy – and the importance of peer support. Paul and Merilyn outlined the range of services provided by GAPA (e.g. respite, camps, scholarships, outings, advice) and the need for these to be available across the State.

Laura Breslin, The Benevolent Society

Our research and practice experience tells us that children in statutory foster care and kinship care have the same level of needs but may need different kinds of support. The Benevolent Society has developed a Kinship Carer Assessment Tool, which helps the worker, family and child to develop a tailored support plan together. Kinship carers might not need or want training, but might want to talk to someone about their child's behaviour, might want respite care, help with homework etc. For some carers, support might be intensive and then taper off, whilst others may need more support as the carer gets older or the child's needs change.

Anne Charlton, Central Coast Family Support Service

Grandparents want information re supports available for children, respite, social opportunities for children, emotional support. Grandparents are very fearful of Community Services; most don't retain a caseworker post court order; most don't receive financial support.

Louise Voigt, Barnardos

Louise advocates kinship care being removed from OOHC but funded as family support, with priority service access given to these children (e.g. Health). There are very formalised processes in OOHC which are not appropriate to kinship care. This should not affect allowances to carers, which should be maintained.

Jane Woodruff's summary of key points from speakers and panel

- The NSW framework is complex and difficult as there are different types of kinship care with different rules
- The Victorian model unpacked this complexity and designed system which allocates different roles, responsibilities and entitlements

- NZ research shows that generally kids do all right in kinship care
- Key policy drivers:
 - if kinship care is in OOHC this leads to certain consequences
 - 'least intrusive' and what we mean by that
- Services need to be funded to provide a continuum of support, with flexibility to provide different level of intensity of support
- Value of supported care allowance – needs to be maintained.

- **Issues raised in audience discussion**
- **Parity for Carers:** Self-funded retirees having to draw on savings; want parity in financial support to that received by foster carers and access to legal support (eg kinship carers can't access legal aid to pursue matters in the family court.)
- **Informal Care:** grandparents are caring for children informally with no support, often without Centrelink support; often parents are reluctant to go to Centrelink because they are in fear of the parents; there is no data re the number of children in informal care, not even recorded in school enrolments, by identifying these carers we should be giving them access to the supported care allowance. In the Family Court the carers have to prove that the children are at risk of significant harm. However the children's wellbeing is at risk if carers don't have access to financial and other supports.
- **Allowances:** Annette Gallard, CEO Community Services, clarified situation re Supported Care Allowance – in all states, where there is a children's court or equivalent, families are entitled to a statutory care allowance through Centrelink. In NSW, families can get the Supported Care Allowance if there has not been a court order, **if the child is in need of care and protection**. The Boston Consulting Group recommended that Supported Care Allowance should only be provided where there is a child protection concern. This has been in place since January 2010. CS has conducted a review of kinship carers receiving the supported care allowance. This has taken place in 3 CSCs: Shellharbour, Dubbo, Kempsey. Centrelink now has grandparent advisers to link people to financial support, respite and legal aid.
- **Consistency in policy:** In the absence of structured policy responses, we're getting a lot of responses being developed at the local level; the Victorian framework of a continuum seems to make a lot of sense.

- **Family Group Conferencing:** We don't have a good understanding of the pathways that lead people into kinship care. Family group conferencing is important in ensuring the child gets the support they need.
- **Accreditation:** Do all kinship care services need to be accredited and funded under OOHC program? Is this the best way to go for kinship care?
- **An integrated system:** We need to join up our systems; we have separate child protection, family support and OOHC systems. We want an integrated system to support children and families.
- **Program fit and rural issues:** Current funding doesn't fit with the needs of the carers and their children – especially in a rural area. There is a lack of wrap-around services and support for transport taking kids to appointments to keep them healthy (IPTAS not enough). High need for support for some carers – e.g. a grandmother who has nine children in her care. There's also the health issues of the grandparents to consider
- **Child Focus:** It's important in discussions of kinship care to be child-focused rather than carer focused. Eg system needs to be child-focused and responsive to carers. Need to consider how to support children where carer has multiple children in their care.

Jane Woodruff summed up as follows:

We need to pay attention to pathways into care and look at engagement and support prior to a crisis intervention. One of our concerns should be the high rates of newborns coming into care.

There may be something to learn from disability - need to look at shared care arrangements.

We can't have a system that operates on good will. Where you live, what colour you are and how much money you have, shouldn't determine what services you can get.

We need a system that is responsive to the needs of different families and localities, but at the same time has some consistency. The system needs to be driven in the first instance by the needs of the child. She noted that the Coalition for Children in Care will continue to work on thinking through policy development on kinship care in NSW.