



**Communities  
& Justice**

**Proposed Government / NGO Collaborative Work in  
PSP and Other Areas of Child & Family Service  
Delivery**

# Key Areas of Collaborative Work for DCJ and PSP Providers

## Background

Collaboration is critically important for children in OOHC. From practitioner collaboration with children, families and carers to collaboration between executives in DCJ and PSP Providers, open and honest partnerships help us to share ideas and expertise.

These important partnerships help us build a shared vision for children and the system that supports them, and a way to work towards that vision.

Whilst there are many areas for potential collaboration that can be explored, this paper focuses primarily on specific issues that, following consultation with ACWA and Absec, DCJ would like to highlight as possible key areas for collaborative work between PSP Providers, DCJ, ACWA and AbSec. However, the Department, ACWA and Absec are also very keen to hear from NGO service providers regarding which additional areas you believe warrant collaborative attention. A number of non-PSP-specific areas for potential future collaboration are also outlined in Part 2 of this paper.

It is suggested that a starting point could be to host a forum(s) that seeks to settle the major system issues which both DCJ and PSP providers agree should be the subject of joint work during the terms of the new PSP contract. In addition to identifying these system issues for joint work, at the forum(s) we are also keen to explore what governance and broader operational requirements would need to be put in place to support the success of our joint work on each of these issues, as well as considering what would be the intended outcomes and indicators of success relating to our work on each of these issues<sup>1</sup>.

## Part 1

The focus areas that we have identified for possible collaborative work include, but need not be limited to, the following:

1. Capturing, analysing and responding to critical data relating to the efficiency of core PSP business processes and related outcomes
2. Leaving care planning, access and services
3. Support of Aboriginal children and families and related important work enhancing the footprint of the ACCO sector
4. Improving practice and determining innovative solutions for individual high-risk children in out-of-home care
5. Workforce development, retention and recruitment
6. Carer recruitment practice, including, but not limited to, agreed timelines, the scope for joint work, better targeted recruitment practice etc
7. Parallel planning and effective restoration practice, including effective court practice and peer support for parents through the court process.
8. Streamlining Administrative Processes – an update and ‘stocktake’ discussion
9. Insurance – an update and ‘stocktake’ discussion

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<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere in this paper, we refer to particular issues that would not be dealt with at the forum via the more detailed process of examining governance and operational requirements and desired outcomes. Instead, these issues would be raised at the forum but dealt with via other processes for the reasons outlined in this paper.

## **1. A joint approach to capturing, analysing and responding to critical data regarding the efficiency of core PSP business processes and related outcomes**

It is agreed that data capture, analysis and sharing is an important joint project for the sector and the department going forward. The department is very keen to demonstrate some progress that has been made in the development of a regular reporting program. This work aligns with the PSP Data Roadmap research document (see attached), produced by Professor Leah Bromfield and the UniSA Australian Centre for Child Protection (ACCP) team: the document includes recommendations, under 'Proposed data for exploration of feasibility' section (pages 26-29), on the types of data which should be routinely captured and analysed, along with the need for qualitative research to be undertaken.

It is proposed that, under this joint work, DCJ and NGO representatives would jointly consider the critical data to be captured relating to the efficiency of key business processes and the achievement of the desired outcomes (in relation to PSP and related programs). Other considerations for the capturing and sharing of data should include:

- data required for national reporting,
- contractual reporting requirements under the PSP contracts,
- ensuring that we utilise the data that we are capturing and analysing to drive improvements in our practice and systems, and
- data being shared as part of pilots with a number of PSP Providers.

It is also recognised there are complexities in data capture generally which include the capacity of practitioners to balance direct service provision together with data recording responsibilities (and there are particular issues relating to the ChildStory system). Ensuring that data is accurate and properly assessing the meaning of different data sets is also complex.

### **Possible Forum discussion**

Discussion at the forum(s) could include:

- discussion of the types of data which could be captured and how it should be analysed and used to inform practice and system improvement
- how data can be shared
- a demonstration of pilots that have involved a collaborative process between DCJ and a number of PSP Providers, e.g. via information technology known as the Federated Analytics Platform.
- difficulties in capturing data for national reporting e.g. case plans, leaving care plans and cultural support plans.
- Future reporting in relation to Aboriginal children and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principles
- Capture and analysis of data in relation to CALD children

## **2. Leaving care**

Leaving care planning issues include data capture but also must go well beyond this to the planning and the broader operational framework under which DCJ and PSP providers can give young people who are preparing to leave care, and those who have left care, with the right plans and related supports (including young people with complex trauma and associated behaviours).

Recent reports from CREATE, ACYP and the OCG show that young people leaving care are not being well supported.

The OCG's review of leaving care found that there were some great resources/initiatives provided to young people who are leaving and have left care, but the evidence was lacking regarding the way that we 'make plans happen', and in connection with our actions in supporting these young people more generally.

### **Possible Forum discussion**

- a broader focus on leaving care that examines how we support and train staff to work in this area more generally, including in relation to the planning and implementation of leaving care plans, coupled with consideration of our systems and processes for responding when needs change, including our responses when crisis situations arise.
- creating a mechanism by which we ensure that all care leavers have a leaving care plan that can be implemented, monitored and amended to suit their changing needs. (Further to these issues, we need to be able to know, on an ongoing basis, the overall adequacy of the plans that are being initially developed for care leavers, and the adequacy of our responses when their needs change).
- issues with leaving care planning and the ChildStory system.
- what could we do to make plans come to life and document these actions?
- how do we *build personal support networks* and family connections for young people and what does this look like? It's more than just family finding; what could it look like? e.g. the annual netball team connection.
- the needs of older children and whether they have changed over time
- how broader cultural and societal changes are impacting our work with young people (education, labour market, housing, COVID)

### **3. Joint work required regarding support to Aboriginal children and families**

The work of getting system, policy and practice right for Aboriginal children, young people and families is of critical importance.

AbSec, ACWA and DCJ are collaborating on the NSW Government commitment to transition case management of Aboriginal children to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, which directly addresses Priority Reform 2 under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, *Building the community-controlled sector*.

To further support Closing the Gap, one of DCJ's very important priorities is reducing the number of Aboriginal children and young people coming into care by embedding both the principles of Aboriginal self-determination and the Aboriginal Case Management Policy across all our work. Another is to work with Aboriginal communities and expand culturally appropriate Family Preservation/Support services and related practice.

There is a related need for a planned and well executed expansion of ACCOs through joint work between DCJ and AbSec/ACWA (and our member agencies), with Brendan Thomas taking a lead role for DCJ in relation to the work of the Transforming Aboriginal Outcomes team.

The purpose of the Aboriginal OOHc Transition Project is to ensure the successful transfer of case management for Aboriginal children in OOHc to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).

The placement of Aboriginal children who are unable to remain safely at home with Aboriginal community-controlled agencies upholds their cultural rights and best interests by connecting them to their Aboriginal community and culture. This contributes to their identity and sense of belonging which are important foundations for wellbeing and resilience.

Aboriginal community-controlled agencies' case management of Aboriginal children supports self-determination in line with the Government's commitments under Closing The Gap and in line with the 2019 Family is Culture Review recommendations. It also promotes the involvement of Aboriginal communities in decision making about Aboriginal children.

As all of this work is being led by Brendan Thomas and the Transforming Aboriginal Outcomes team, in close consultation with other key stakeholders such as Absec, while it is important for us to note these various initiatives at the forum, it is also important to recognise that it is being dealt with through a separate process.

### **Possible Forum presentation and discussion**

- At the forum(s), we intend to acknowledge the initiatives underway and/or planned in regard to Aboriginal children, families and communities, as well as related issues pertaining to the growth of ACCOs. However, at the forum(s), we don't intend to explore governance, operational requirements, and success indicators relating work in this particular area because these critically important issues are being dealt with via separate processes.

### **4. Improving practice and determining sector wide innovative solutions for individual children with higher needs and siblings**

The ongoing work by ACWA, Absec and DCJ to develop innovative solutions for children and young people who we find difficult to place. A number of these children and young people have experienced placement breakdown. Many of these children have particular needs requiring innovative foster care solutions. We can also have difficulty placing certain sibling groups. We are keen to explore together how we can avoid, and promptly respond to, those children and young people who are currently being placed in ACA, IPA or other non-preferred placement arrangements.

#### **Possible forum discussion**

- Do panels lead to innovative solutions/provide additional risk mitigation?
- How do we bring the right people together for each child?
- What is the role of the department in finding solutions for these children?
- What are other critical issues that we need to address together?

### **5. Workforce issues including staffing challenges and development and training initiatives**

A range of workforce challenges are common themes across DCJ and PSP Providers, including in the areas of recruitment, retention and the building of knowledge and skills of our workforce.

Against the background of the positive collaborative work underway involving DCJ, Absec and ACWA, relating to the Joint Workforce Development and Training (Skills Strategy) initiative, it

is timely to consider the opportunities that we might have to fully capitalise on our opportunities to work together in this critical area.

#### **Possible forum discussion**

- Workforce issues may be a useful area for broader discussion and problem solving.
- This may include some discussion about the Workforce Training and Development initiative, in line with the project plan

## **6. Carer recruitment**

Carer recruitment is an area of significant change and potential collaboration. The challenge of recruiting the right carers in a timely manner is an issue for all providers in the sector, including for DCJ. It is critical to the safety, wellbeing and permanency of all children in care.

It is also critical that we examine the issue of recruitment through the lens of what we learn from relevant data (including, but not limited to, data relating to those in Alternative Care Arrangements and other unsuitable care arrangements). We need to seek to determine together, how do we better ensure there are suitable foster care options across the sector to care for all children, no matter their level of need.

#### **Possible forum discussion**

- the role of DCJ in recruiting emergency carers,
- collaborative practices in the overall recruitment landscape, and
- the role of data in relation to carer recruitment and placement matching
- Other critical issues that we need to address together

## **7. Parallel planning and effective restoration practice**

When children first enter care, their case plan goal is always restoration and providers and DCJ need to work together, so that children are given every opportunity to return to their parents and be cared for safely by them.

However, we know that some parents are unable to make the changes that will keep their children safe within timeframes that suit the needs of children. At the moment, most children who are not restored go on to be placed in long term care. However, this does not align with the permanency principles in the legislation or the need of children for stability.

#### **Possible forum discussion**

- How do we improve restoration outcomes for children in OOHC?
- How do DCJ and Providers work together so that restoration is always the first priority, but that parallel planning occurs for those circumstances where parents are unable to adequately care for their child?

In addition, in relation to achieving timely permanency outcomes for children, there are several areas in which the President of the Children's Court has expressed a particular interest in collaborating with the sector to achieve better outcomes. In particular, the President is keen to explore with the sector the following:

1. "How DCJ and FSPs / NGOs can work together to ensure the court has all relevant information to assist in making decisions about the best interests of the safety, welfare and well-being of all children who have matters before the

court.” (Judge Skinner could update participants on discussions regarding a court practice direction that has been under development).

2. “The peer parent project in Broadmeadow and the improved access to justice and engagement with justice when parents are supported through court by a person who has also experienced the care jurisdiction. Better engagement by parents leads to better outcomes for kids.”

An additional area of concern that the President of the Children’s Court has raised is:

3. “The need to oversee standards of residential care, especially regarding contact and culture. Other issues such as educational engagement, matching housemates, therapeutic engagement, carer quality and care stability impact the kids in care.”

At the initial forum, the President will outline her views on these issues in a presentation, followed by a process for discussing the specific matters raised by her Honour. (This exercise might also include some consideration of what governance arrangements might need to be put in place to enable us to appropriately address the issues raised by Judge Skinner).

## **8. Streamlining Administrative Processes**

As this is an area where there has already been substantial collaborative effort, it would be useful to provide the sector with a progress report on the joint DCJ / NGO Streamlining Administrative Burden Working Group, with an opportunity for discussion of possible future governance arrangements and related work on specific topics in this area.

## **9. Insurance**

It is important that the sector receives an update on DCJ/NGO participation in the Interjurisdictional Working Group looking at the critical issue of insurance, and that there is the opportunity for discussion of the current status of this issue.

## **Part 2**

### **Other areas for possible collaborative work that could be briefly canvassed at the forum but not dealt with in any detail**

We also believe that there is significant scope for collaboration on a number of broader issues relating to vulnerable children, young people and their families. However, we recognise that tackling broader issues of the type referred to below would require much more extensive multi-agency ‘buy in’ than those who will be attending the proposed forum(s) (including the ‘buy in’ of a significant number of government human service and justice agencies).

These broader issues include but are not limited to:

1. **Building stronger support systems for vulnerable children, young people and their families (among other things, this would reduce the numbers of children coming into care)**

a. A strong focus on early intervention

A priority for DCJ and our sector is the development of an integrated and collaborative early intervention service system that is able to respond to vulnerable families, young people and children. We all know that effective early intervention systems encompass a range of parameters, including:

- child development pathways and processes,
- the social and economic benefits of prevention and early intervention,
- risk and protective factors for positive child development,
- key pathways for intervention at key developmental stages (from antenatal through to adolescence), and
- system design elements that facilitate prevention and early intervention.

b. Related system reform more broadly

Given the scope of the issues associated with real system reform, and the range of stakeholders who would need to be involved (e.g. other government agencies - state and federal; local government; non-government organisations; philanthropy), we believe that this challenge of achieving meaningful system change could be pursued through a number of mechanisms.

For example, in the review of Their Futures Matter, the Auditor General's report recognised that system reform (and not just various place based endeavours) is required on a large scale. On this issue, the SW Sydney and the separate Western Sydney KEYS initiatives (that uses a 'Navigator' interagency model of providing a co-ordinated multi agency response to meeting need) are illustrative of early steps down this path.

We also note that there are various other initiatives including, but not limited to:

- The Maranguka Community Hub/Just Reinvest partnership in Bourke and the soon to commence Brewarrina place based initiative (the former has strong State and Federal buy in, as well as two philanthropic investors - Düsseldorf Forum and Generation One: Minderoo Foundation, and Brewarrina will have Generation One: Minderoo Foundation investment/support).
- First Steps Counts in Taree (which will also be using the Navigator model) and the broad collaboration of those agencies involved in the Mid North Coast 4 Kids collective impact initiative (with their strong first 2000 days focus).
- The ever-expanding Justice Reinvestment initiatives.

Against this background, the time is right to consider the two separate but related issues of system transformation and place-based reform initiatives (and most importantly, what we now know about the essential elements of success in both areas).

While we wouldn't seek to deal with these issues in any substantial manner at the forum, there could be scope for a high-level discussion that explores what's needed in NSW to gain real traction in achieving the broad system reform required, while still maintaining a commitment to strong place based, community-led initiatives. In this regard, ACWA has suggested that the time is ripe for the government to appoint a well credentialed steering committee to oversee what's happening in these related areas, and to ensure that the State puts both the right governance and backbone operational support in place, to be able to embed and scale up this type of work over time.

c. Other related issues that need to be addressed

In terms of any system reform work, it is also important to acknowledge that work of this kind would need to focus on addressing the needs of particular cohorts, including strengthening our 'first two thousand days' response, the support provided to vulnerable children and young people in the educational system, and our response very vulnerable older children and young people (including those who become embedded in the criminal justice system). Once again, while we wouldn't seek to deal with these issues in any substantial manner at the forum(s), there could be scope for a high-level discussion that explores what's needed in NSW to gain real traction in better meeting the needs of these groups of children and young people, ideally as part of a broader system reform initiative.

Another very important example of a system weakness requiring a response is that we have built a child protection system that emphasises the 'reporting' of ROSH matters over actually providing effective 'responses'. In terms of tackling this issue of enhancing the capacity of the system to respond to ROSH cases, attention needs to be given to putting flesh on, and effectively implementing, Justice Wood's vision of 'shared responsibility' for child protection. On a related note, section 27A of the Care Act - 'Alternative reporting arrangements' - provides the vehicle by which matters that would otherwise be the subject of ROSH reports could be dealt with outside of Helpline reporting, if they were effectively handled via collaborative agency/NGO responses. However, to date, this provision hasn't been utilised.

DCJ notes that the Department is currently examining the Mandatory Reporter Guide and the surrounding system as part of the review of Structured Decision Making tools. A collaborative co-design process is being led by the tools' owners and developers, Evident Change. This work is in its infancy and is involving key players including Health, Education and PSP Providers.

d. The Domestic Violence and Child Protection Integration Project

We also thought that the forum could provide an opportunity to briefly discuss a good recent example of a strong commitment to work jointly together - the Domestic Violence and Child Protection Integration Project.

ACWA, DVNSW, Absec, DCJ, Health and police are collaborating on this project aimed at improving integrated responses to domestic and family violence where there are children in the family.