

FCAV / PPSS Carer Help Line

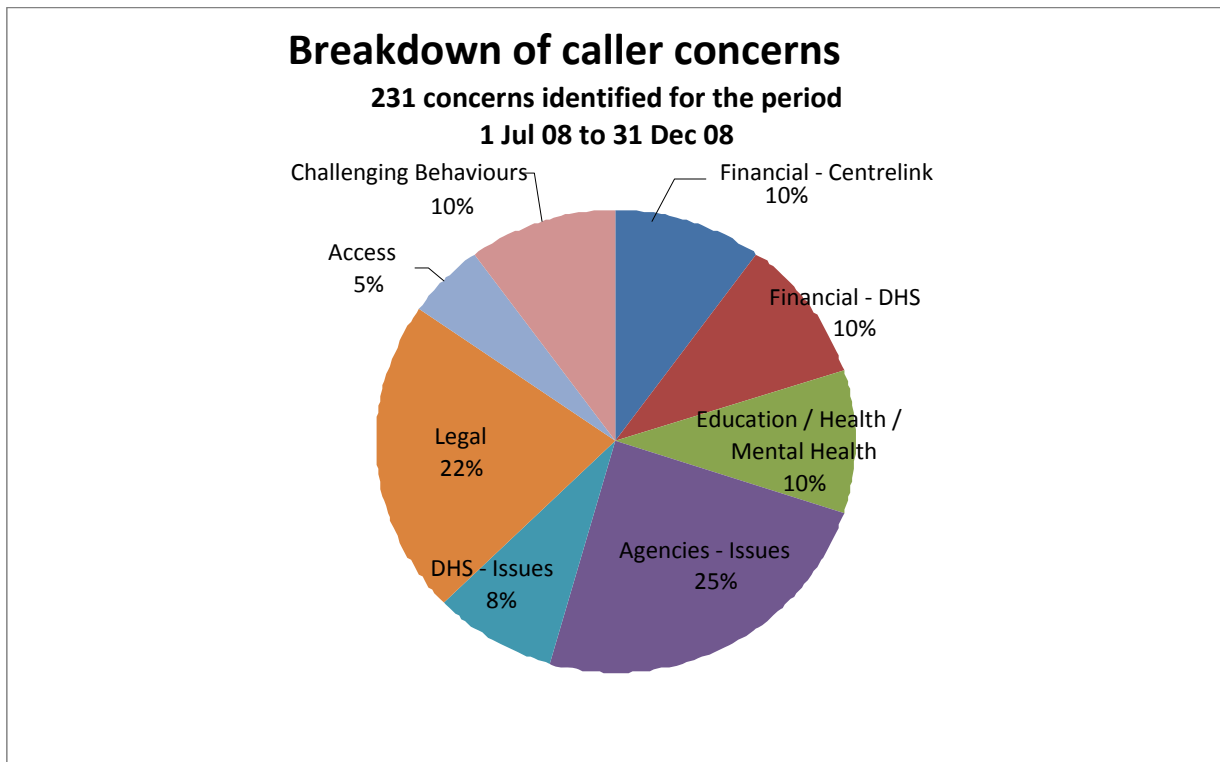
Breakdown of carer concerns - July 2008 to December 2008

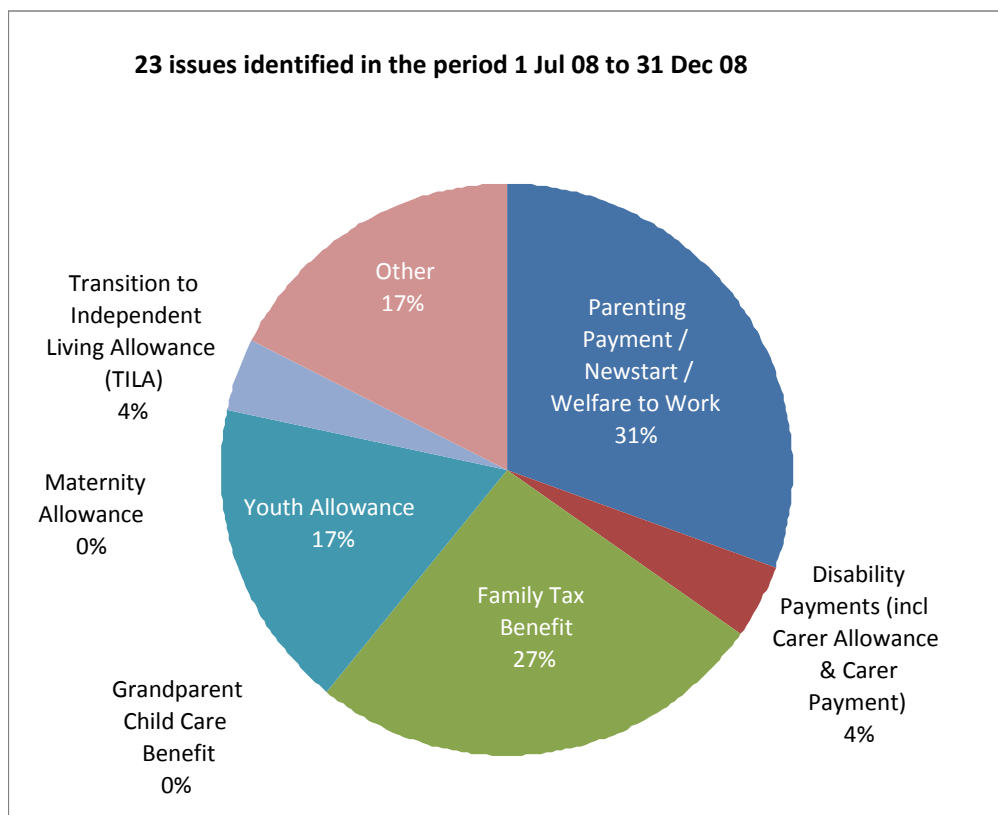
In July 2008, the FCAV undertook to employ a Help Line Coordinator to manage the FCAV / PPSS Carer Help Line. A direct result of this appointment was the establishment of the FCAV / PPSS Care Help Line database, and the subsequent recording of carer concerns based on formalised, factual and reliable data received by office staff.

In the six months from 1 July 2008, FCAV office staff took 90 calls on the Carer Help Line and responded to 14 emails and letters. These contacts from carers resulted in a total of 231 separate concerns being identified and recorded for statistical purposes. The following is a break down of those concerns along with key statistics for the period.

- Total contacts received: Calls: 90 Emails: 13 Letters: 1
- Average call time: 24 minutes
- Total file handling time: 419 hours
- Average file handling time: 4 hrs
- 92% of concerns actioned within 48 hours of receiving the contact
- Contact received from: 52 Foster Carers
 14 Kinship Carers
 7 Adoptive Parents
 7 Permanent Carers
 5 Foster/Permanent Carers
 2 Respite Carers
 1 Kinship/Permanent Carers
 1 Kinship/Non-statutory

The following slides detail the breakdown of carer concerns as captured to the FCAV/PPSS Carer Help Line for the period 1 July 2008 to 31 December 2008:



Issue Category: Financial - Centrelink

Major issue identified: 31% - Parenting Payment / Newstart / Welfare to Work

Outline of issue:

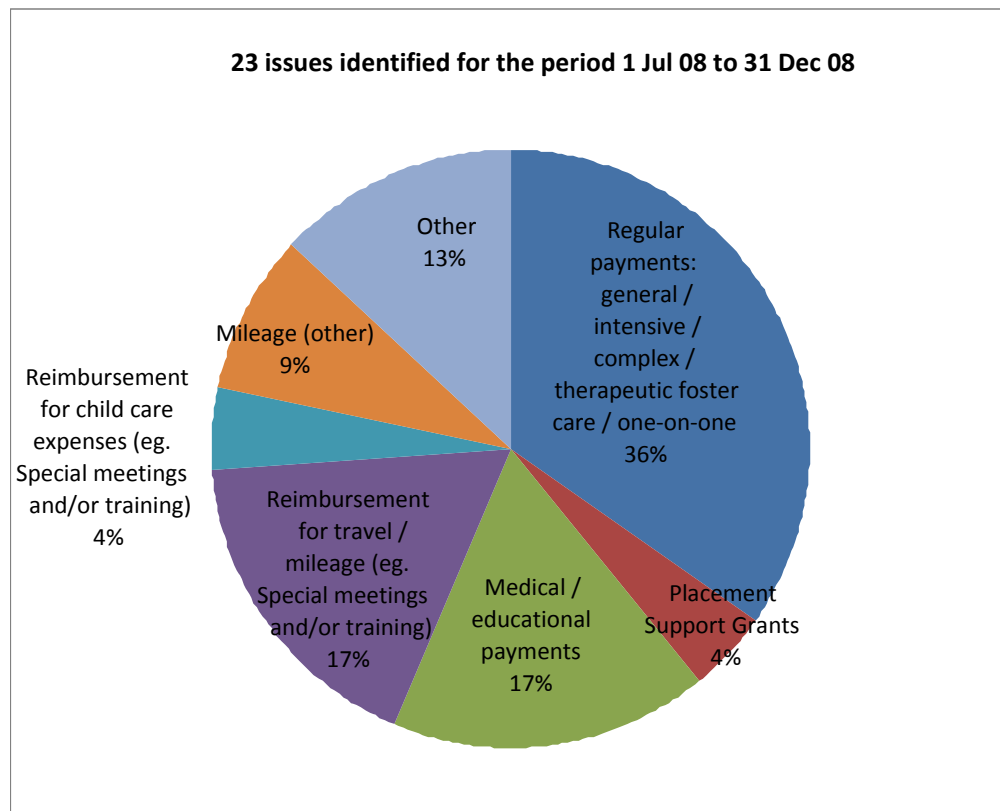
There is a lot of confusion and misinformation around what entitlements are available to carers. In addition, there is considerable frustration around the Welfare to Work program and the requirements of carers once a child in their care turns six years of age. This is particularly in the case of grandparent carers.

Recommendations:

FCAV met with Centrelink representatives on 6 March 2009 with a view to raising carer concerns. This meeting has gone a long way to clarifying many Centrelink-related issues, payments and entitlements. In addition, we have received a comprehensive support document along with an introduction to the Centrelink website.

Further navigation and exploration of the Centrelink website will see FCAV staff better able to assist carers and direct them to the best website option, or advise directly from the website what the carer is and is not entitled to from Centrelink.

In addition, the development and publication of relevant and easy to read fact sheets will further assist our members in obtaining and understanding the information they need. Once the FCAV website has undergone enhancement, these fact sheets can be made available to carers via this medium.

Issue Category: Financial – Department of Human Services

Major issue identified: 36% - Regular payments: general / intensive / complex / therapeutic foster care / one-on-one

Outline of issue:

There are three distinct areas of concern around the issue of 'Regular payments;':

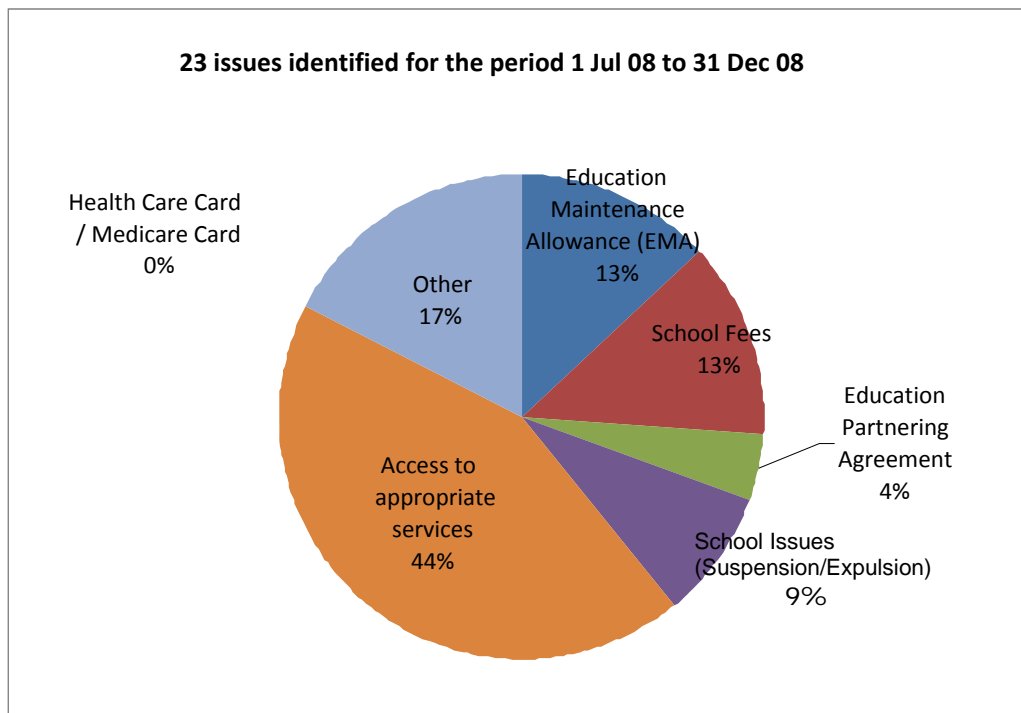
- Frustration for non-statutory/informal kinship carers who do not qualify for this payment as there is no Child Protection involvement with the case.
- Prospective carers seeking information on what financial supports are available to carers.
- Carers in receipt of caregiver reimbursement payments who believe the child in their care should be in a higher classification than what they are. Eg: In 'General', should be 'Intensive'. The added element to this is there seems to be no available information for carers on how these classifications are determined.

Recommendations:

With the exception of Western Australia, Victoria is the only state to not promote very clearly the financial entitlements for home-based carers on their associated websites.

In addition, calling DHS often results in not coming away with the information of what the reimbursement rates are for home-based carers. Despite direct inquiries with DHS, I have been unable to determine how children are categorised between General, Intensive and Complex for the purposes of caregiver reimbursement.

The Department of Human Services needs to offer a more transparent and open approach to information when it comes to Child Protection and the associated elements such as home-based care and caregiver reimbursement policies.

Issue Category: Education / Health / Mental Health

Major issue identified: 44% - Access to appropriate services

Outline of issue:

At 44% of issues raised in this category the magnitude of the impact of the issue of access to appropriate services speaks for itself.

In most of the cases raised with FCAV in this category, the carers are not seeking indulgent testing or assessment for the children in their care, but rather they are seeking basic counselling services, medical and psychological assessments.

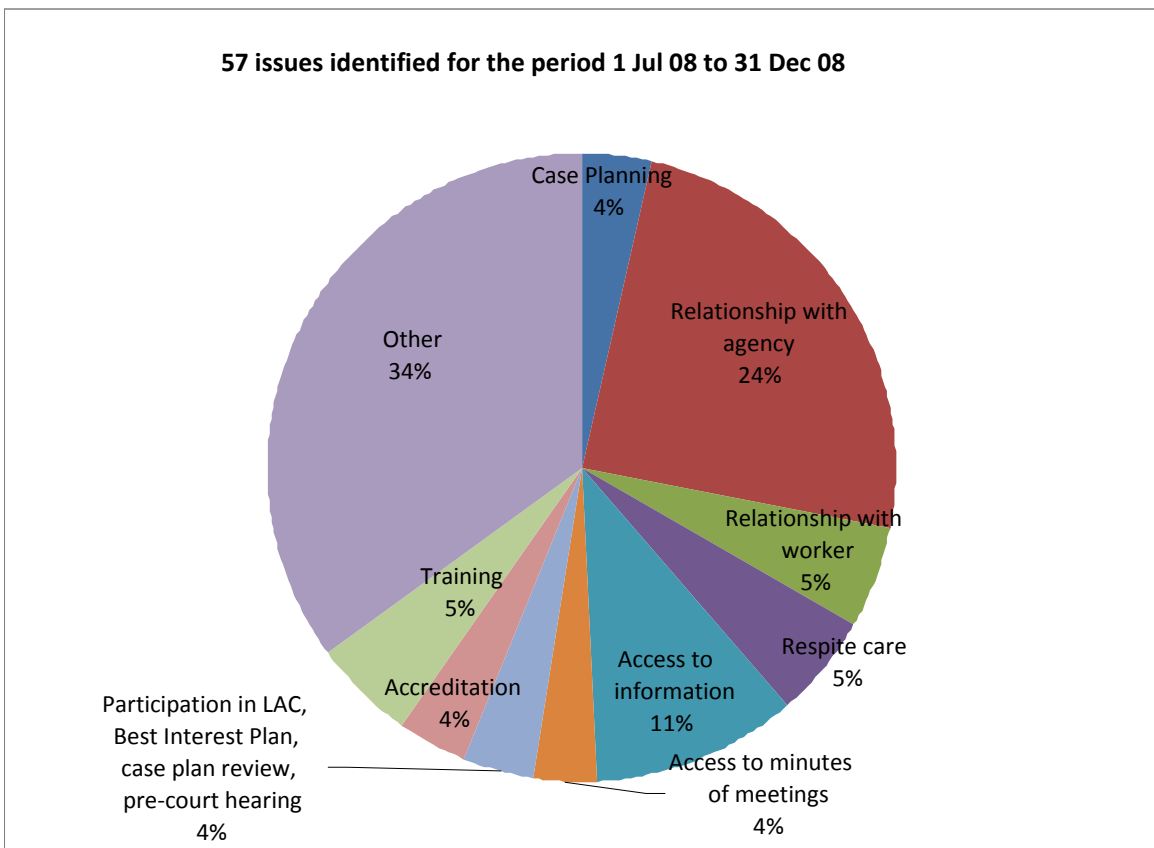
There were a minority of cases where the care was seeking access to significant and extensive services for a child in their care however it should be noted that in each instance, there was an associated significant need or circumstance surrounding the child.

Recommendations:

There needs to be greater promotion of and availability to services for children in home-based care.

It is recommended the FCAV work in conjunction with the Office of Child Safety to see what work can be done to better inform carers (and workers) of services available to children living in home-based care, along with details of how and where these services can be accessed.

Issue Category: Agencies - Issues



Major issue identified: 34% - Other
24% - Relationship with agency

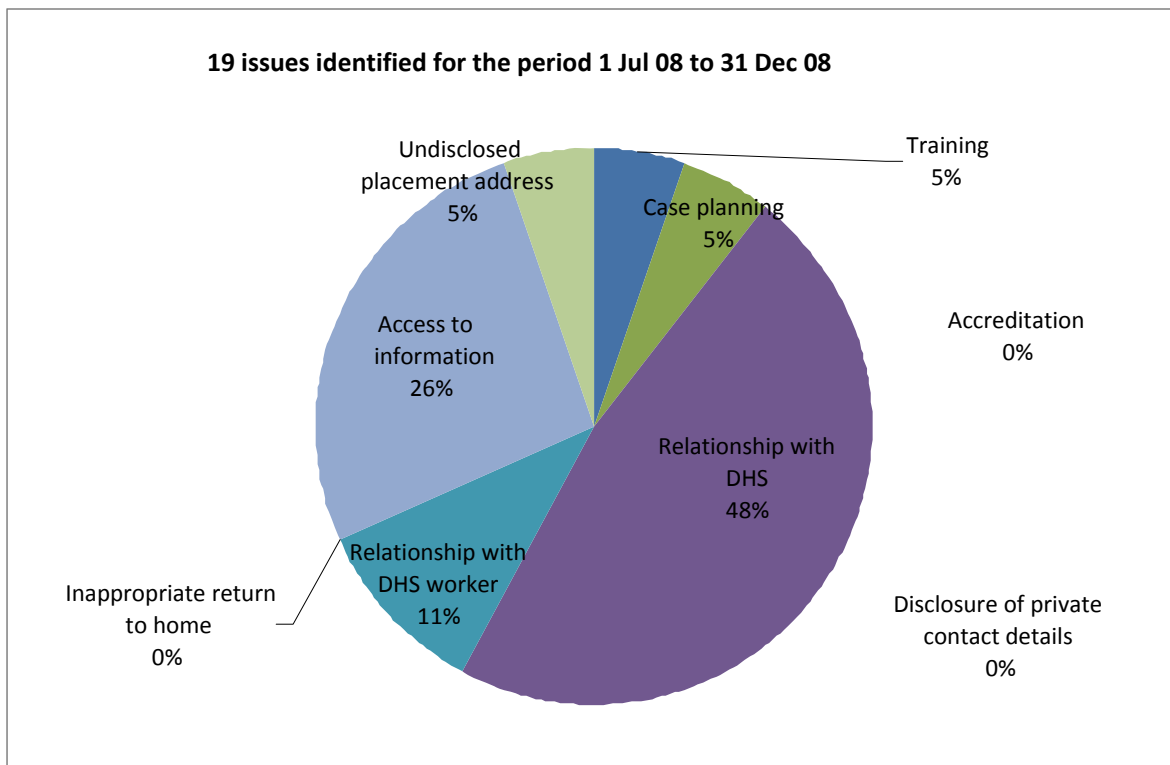
Outline of issue:

The majority topic under this issue falls in to the category of 'Other' which speaks to the breadth of issues that arise between agencies and carers. Given the broad nature of the issues contained within 'Other', we will focus instead on the next major issue of 'Relationship with Agency'.

In the majority of cases the issue of relationship with agency comes down to either a breakdown in communication or a lack of clarity around expectations, roles and responsibilities of those involved. In many cases the growing frustration from the carer's perspective is the changing of agreed conditions, arrangements and processes as the placement continues. While the agency might be highly responsive and supportive, particularly from a costs reimbursement point of view at the commencement of a placement, changing priorities and demands on the agency or agency worker will often see this commitment change over time, leaving the carer to feel unsupported and unacknowledged. This in turn, leads to a gradual breakdown of trust and communication between the carer and the worker, resulting in fractured relationships and in some cases, a weakening of the placement.

Recommendations:

There is no doubt the demands on both workers and carers is considerable, however like any relationship, it is important to dedicate time and energy to maintaining open and strong communication. FCAV would encourage workers and agencies to examine their processes and ensure adequate time is allocated to maintaining effective relationships with carers, no matter how stable the placement might be, to ensure carers feel free to raise concerns if and when they arise.

Issue Category: Department of Human Services - Issues

Major issue identified: 48% - Relationship with DHS

Outline of issue:

It is interesting to note that the combined total of the issue topics 'Relationship with DHS' and 'Access to information' account for 74% on the non-financial issues raised in relation to the Department of Human Services.

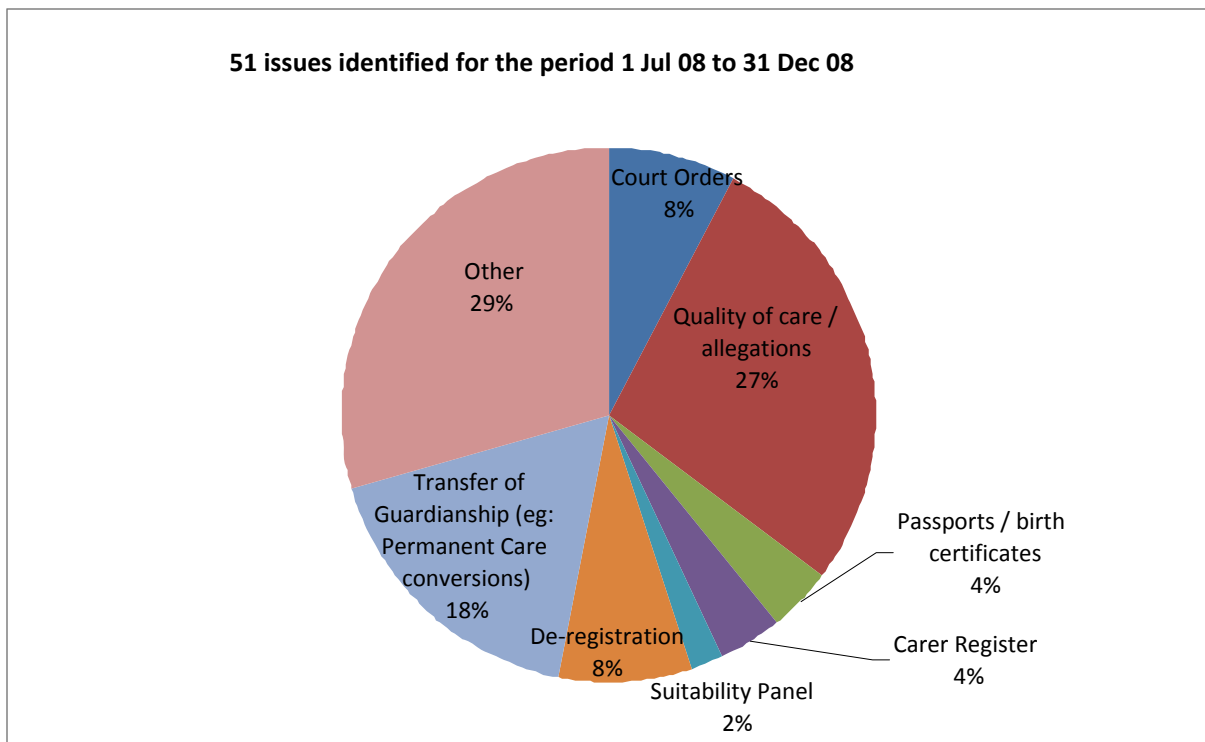
The issue of the Department's lack of clarity regarding carer reimbursement rates has already been touched on in this report, and reported issues around difficulties in obtaining carer reimbursement will also have been reflected in this issue category.

In many cases carers feel unheard and unsupported in their role as carers by DHS which obviously impacts on the relationship between the two parties. Often this will be due to either a breakdown in communication or a perceived failure on DHS's part to meet the carer's expectations in terms of the supports or assistance available.

Recommendations:

As in any relationship, there are roles, responsibilities and demands made on both parties. It takes both parties working together to ensure the strength and ongoing success of a relationship.

The feedback offered in this slide would indicate there is some work to be done around the fostering of more effective and productive relationships and processes between the Department of Human Services and the carers offering their time, their dedication and their homes to children in the home-based care sector.

Issue Category: Legal

Major issue identified: **29% - Other**
 27% - Quality of care / allegations

Outline of issue:

The issue of 'Other' within the category of Legal is not surprising given the lack of understanding that exists amongst lay people when it comes to the myriad of court processes, procedures and requirements. This, coupled with the stress and emotion often associated with Children's or Family Court proceedings often equates to a sense of fear, frustration and a lack of control of one's own situation for many carers.

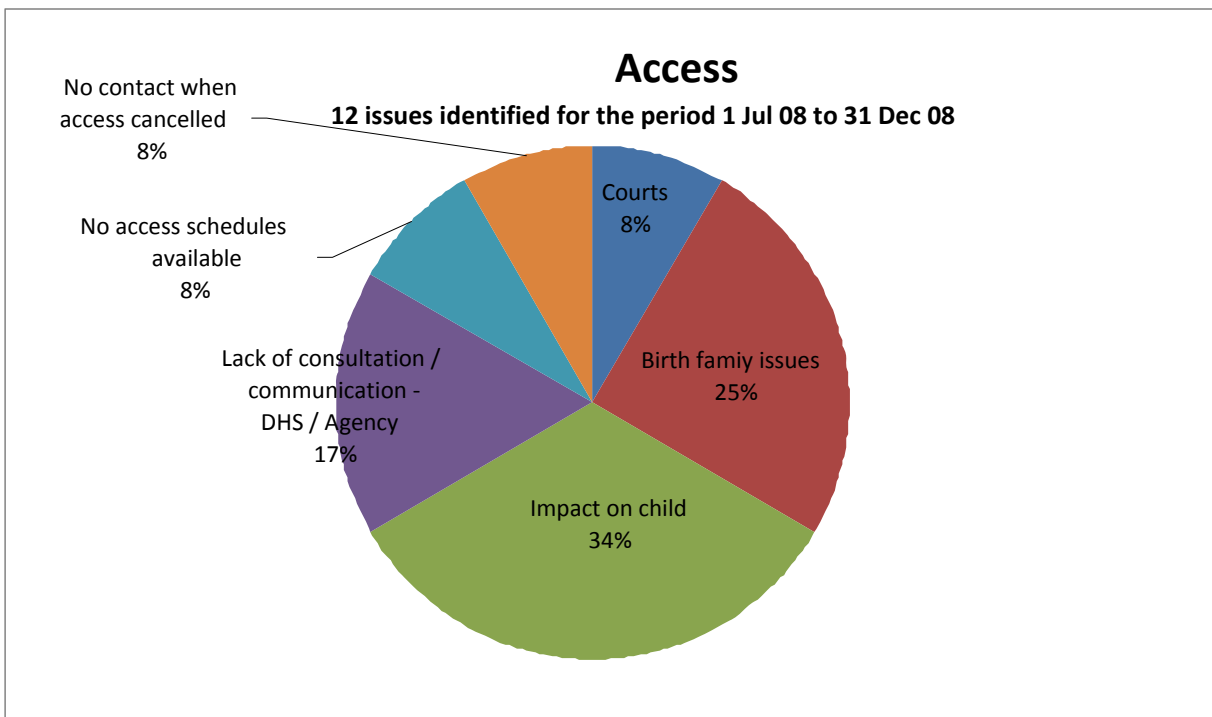
One of the main issues that falls in to the 'Other' category is that of legal representation and advice and the lack of affordable / available services to carers, particularly those holding permanent care orders, but being challenged by the natural parents in through the courts.

The next issue highlighted in this slide is that of quality of care and allegations. Again, there is a sense of fear and lack of control over a situation for carers who find themselves the subject of a quality of care allegation.

Recommendations:

This is a particularly difficult issue to address given the expertise required in many instances. More can be done in regard to promoting free legal advice centres, and FCAV can work to ensure this type of information is available to carers via our website and Help Line Fact Sheets.

The Department of Human Services has published "Guidelines for Responding to Quality of Care Concerns in Out of Home Care", however this is a resource for workers and at 242 pages is not a concise user-friendly document. It is recommended that a piece of work be completed around creating a carer-based handbook detailing the process for quality of care allegations to allow carers to be more informed of the process should they find themselves in the position of defending a quality of care allegation.

Issue Category: Access

Major issue identified: 34% - Impact on Child

Outline of issue:

The issue of access and the positive and negative aspects of this for the children involved is an incredibly difficult one.

In some circumstances, access is great – the children benefit from positive time with their parent/s and the parent/s have an opportunity to enjoy and spend time with their child in a present and attentive environment.

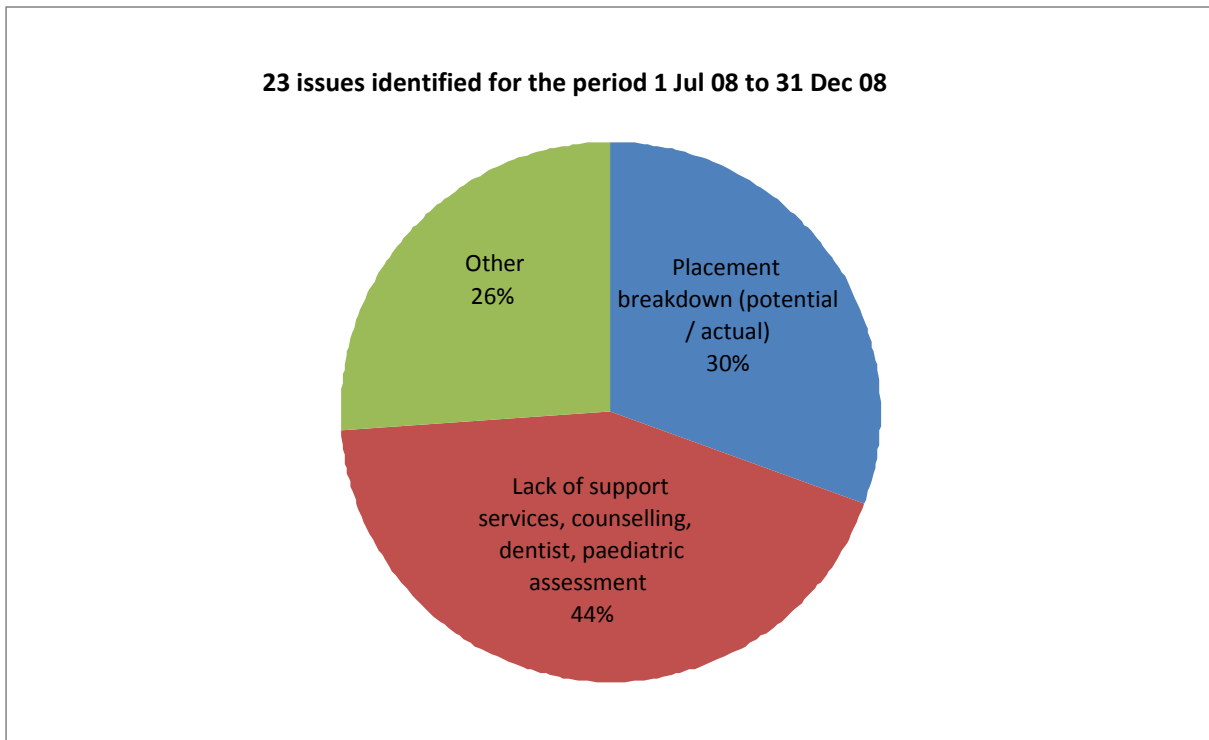
In other instances, children are required to visit with parent/s they do not wish to see and spend that time in the presence of a parent impaired or otherwise pre-occupied in a cold, supervised environment. In these instances, carers then have to cope with the inevitable fall out of behaviours arising from the visit.

In the case of infants, access will be anything up to a visit per day in an effort to ensure the parent and child have an opportunity to bond, however the reality of a schedule such as this a child of this age needs to be considered.

The issue of 'impact on child' may also be indicative of instances where children have been removed from a stable placement with little or no perceived foundation.

Recommendation:

As a sector we need to do more to ensure the best possible situations and outcomes are achieved for children when it comes to access. Work needs to be done with the Courts, Department of Human Services, Office of Child Safety, child psychologists and related industry professionals to ensure guidelines are established and followed that ensure safe, appropriate and balanced access is achieved for children in home-based care.

Issue Category: Challenging Behaviours

Major issue identified: 44% - Lack of support services, counselling, dentist, paediatric assessment

Outline of Issue:

This result is in direct correlation with that highlighted in the 'Education / Health / Mental Health' category, and is further indication of not only the difficulty carers have in accessing required services, but also the effects it starts to have on the stability of the placement.

If carers are to succeed in their role of providing a stable and positive placement for a child in home-based care, it is imperative they receive the supports and services they require to assist these children.

Recommendations:

It was recommended earlier that work be done to promote the various services available to carers. Further to this work, it is important that a review of available services be conducted to ensure there are in fact the service and support options available to assist carers in caring and providing for children in home-based care, in particular in the areas of health and mental health assessment and treatment.

Report written 11 March 2009 – Beth Parker, Help Line Coordinator