

Carer Advisory Group Quarterly Update

July 2018

The Carer Advisory Groups (CAGs), now in their third year of operation, met at the Carer Advisory Group Forum on 23 March 2018. The forum was attended by Jenny Mikakos, MP, Minister for Children and Families, Minister for Early Childhood Education and Minister for Youth Affairs.

The forum provided a great opportunity for carers and carer representatives to contribute to the future design of the children and families services system in Victoria. Divisional CAGs shared updates on their activities and progress. They also discussed the challenges carers are facing and how CAGs can help to address these challenges. CAGs also spent time on developing their local area plans for 2018, focusing on strengthening and supporting carers at the local level.

Update on Divisional CAG Activities

North Division

The North Division CAG has focussed on education for children and young people in out-of-home care, featuring presentations from Department of Education and Training (DET), Anglicare's TEACHaR program, and the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare's 'Raising Expectations' program and group discussions on education-related issues facing carers and the children in their care.

The North CAG also discussed increasing school awareness and focus on the effect of trauma on children and young people in out-of-home care and the role of the Lookout service. The group also discussed ways of improving communication and information sharing between the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and DET.

The North CAG held its quarterly meeting on 8 May 2018 where they welcomed and confirmed their new Co-Chair, Caroline Buchanan. CAG members were updated on progress regarding the transition of Aboriginal children to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOS), carer authorisation and documents for children in Out of Home Care and contributed to a discussion on the department's Therapeutic Approaches to Care Project.

The North CAG identified the following priority areas for their 2018 Action Plan.

- Carer retention and support
- Communication Strategy North Division
- Case Planning and Care Team involvement of Carers

The next North CAG meeting will be held on 7 August 2018 from 10:00am and 12:30pm.

South Division

The South Division CAG finalised its Carers' Journey Picture board, which has two versions, including one with carer comments and another with suggestions for resources needed for carers to be able to undertake their role effectively. The picture board posters have been distributed to stakeholders including Community Service Organisations providing foster care in the South Division and other CAGs state-wide. The picture boards have been well received and are being used by some agencies in offices for recruitment purposes and for training.

The South division CAG held its second quarterly meeting on 26 June 2018. The following were identified as the most common issues affecting carers and children in out of home care:

- Carers not receiving adequate information regarding children placed in their care. Sometimes the information is incomplete or outdated.
- Confusion as to whether carers should be given referral documents for the children placed in their care.
- Carers not being informed about changes regarding case plans for children placed in their care, for example changes to contact arrangements and court outcomes.
- Delays in receiving important documents for children in out of home care

The next South CAG meeting will be held on 27 August 2018 at the Pakenham Justice Centre.

West Division

The West Carer Advisory Group met on 31 May 2018 to discuss its action plan for 2018 and review the outcomes of the state-wide CAG forum on 23 March. The meeting focused on progressing key priorities including improved communication with carers and participation of carers in decision making.

The West CAG is also focusing on a Standardised Care Team Agenda for the division. A trial of the standard care team agenda was conducted in late 2017 with positive results. The agenda was well received by Child Protection workers, carers and agencies who commented that the agenda:

- keeps the care team focus on the child's case plan direction.
- keeps the care team accountable with clear documented responsibilities and actions with due dates.
- is a great tool for the 72 hour meeting of a new placement where difficulty is experienced in obtaining required information.
- is valuable for new workers and when case management responsibility is handed over, the record gives a good sense of the child and what has or has not been completed.
- fields create a good history for the child rather than a scattered approach of case notes throughout the CRIS file.
- a comprehensive care team meeting record will help keep court reports and case plans child focused and on track.

The West division CAG will endorse the final report on the Standardised Care Team Meeting Agenda at its August meeting. The report will be circulated to home based care providers and divisional child protection staff, central Out of Home Care Unit and other divisional CAGs.

The next West CAG meeting will be held on 23 August 2018 at DHHS Ballarat office from 10:30am to 1:00pm.

East Division

The East division CAG met on 16 February 2018 and discussed the following topics;

- How carers' voices are being heard on state-wide issues,
- Transitioning Aboriginal Children to ACCOs
- The Care Team Project.

The East CAG members were advised that carers were concerned about the loss of connections with existing support networks and peer support following transfer to an ACCO. Carers also expressed concern about how their information was going to be transferred across to ACCOs, potential loss of connections and existing support networks and peer support.

The East CAG continues to make contributions to state-wide issues impacting on the day-to-day care of children and young people. At the last CAG meeting, members were given an overview of the division's commitment to strengthening a placement-based approach to partnering and service development. This has seen the establishment of an Out-of-home care Executive Leadership meeting, chaired by the East Division's Deputy Secretary and attended by the local out-of-home care CEOs or executive officers.

The East CAG meeting also agreed to establish area based leadership groups in each operational area of the division. It is hoped that this approach will encourage more carers to participate in CAG activities, especially those

who face challenges in participating in the divisional group. Another rationale for the establishment of area based leadership groups is that the new groups would enable greater connection between local ACCOs, CSOs and Child Protections managers and carers.

The next East CAG meeting will be held on 1 August 2018 at DHHS Shepparton office from 12:30pm to 2:30pm.

Contact Information

For more information about the Carer Advisory Groups, to suggest an item for discussion or enquire about joining the groups please contact one of the divisional contacts below.

Divisional contacts:

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