

Carer Advisory Group Quarterly Update

August 2017

The Carer Advisory Groups met for the third quarterly meeting this year, bringing together new and existing members for the next 18 month term.

Members include carers, carer representatives and staff from community service organisations and the Department of Health and Human Services (the department) to improve communication and identify service improvements in out-of-home care. The department would like to take the opportunity to thank all carers, agencies and departmental staff who have been involved in the groups, both past and present for their commitment to making a difference in the kinship and foster carer experience.

North Division

The North Division Carer Advisory Group has been focusing on a range of kinship carer needs and issues and looking at the common challenges that kinship carers face and these are being incorporated into the groups action plan.

Members have been presented with an update on the new kinship care manual being developed and the North Division has committed to producing a kinship care-specific version of the Carer Reference Guide following the manual's release.

The group is also discussing:

- the role of carers in case and care planning and the need for better communication and information-sharing between the department and carers; and
- systemic issues affecting carers, particularly about obtaining carer authorisations.

South Division

The South Division Carer Advisory Group has held a workshop on 28 August 2017 to explore the journey that foster carers take from initial interest in caring through training and assessment to the first and further placements. A consultant 'sketcher' ran the workshop and now has the ambitious task of putting the many stories that emerged on the day into a picture board of the typical carers' journey. Nine of the South Division's carers contributed and it was clear that everyone's experience and story is unique however common themes were identified.

Following completion of the picture board it will be used by the Carer Advisory Group as a tool for planning and for identifying the critical points at which we may be able to intervene to maximise recruitment and or retention

West Division

The Minister for Families and Children met with the West Division Carer Advisory Group co-chairs including the carer co-chair and a carer member of the group in July 2017. The purpose of the meeting was to enable Minister Mikakos to hear firsthand about the achievements of the Carer Advisory Group over the past eighteen months.

The first meeting of the second eighteen month term of the West division Carer Advisory Group was held 22 August 2017. Composition of the new group includes a balance of kinship carers, foster carers, mainstream and Aboriginal organisations from across the division.

The group continues to take a proactive role in state-wide issues impacting the day to day care of children and young people including the challenges and delays carers experience in obtaining children's documentation such as Medicare, Centrelink, birth certificates, passports and carer authorisations.

To improve the effectiveness of care team meetings, service providers and Child Protection in the West division are trialling a standardised care team agenda which ensures carers are informed and included in the day to day care planning as a valued member of a child's care team. A report of the trial will be prepared and circulated by the end of the year.

East Division

The East Division Carer Advisory Group has been focusing on improving care teams and a project has commenced in the East Division in direct response to feedback from the Group, which aims to strengthen, enhance and support the operation, function and importance of care teams for children and young people. The project will include how care teams are a critical tool in facilitating the relationship between child protection, carers and placement agency workers.

The group is also focusing on the Transitioning Aboriginal Children to Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations project which is now a standing agenda item.

A pilot initiative has also commenced in the Goulburn Area in the East Division to support a more streamlined assessment process for kinship carers at the time placement establishment, that links the level of support to the needs of the child and carers. The pilot started in early September 17 and will run for six months. It is estimated to support 24 kinship placements

State-wide update – obtaining identification and other documents for children and young people in out-of-home care.

The department is working with the Foster Care Association of Victoria and Carer Advisory Group carer co-chairs from all divisions to identify issues relating to obtaining identification and other documentation and is progressing options to improve processes including obtaining carer authorisations. A project is also underway with Births, Deaths and Marriages in Victoria to conduct a data matching exercise of 3-4 year old children in out-of-home care to identify those whose births are unregistered. The project will facilitate registration of those children and through that process identify any systemic improvements that can be made for all children and young people in out-of-home care.

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

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