

Carer Advisory Group updates January 2017

The Carer Advisory Groups in each division met four times in 2016 and are working to action plans created by the groups. These updates are a snapshot of progress to enable all Victorian kinship and foster carers to be informed of what the groups are working on. You are welcome to contact the Carer Advisory Group in your division if you have a suggestion for the group to consider.

As the Carer Advisory Groups commence their second year, we would like to take the opportunity to thank all carers, agencies and departmental staff involved for their commitment to making a difference in the kinship and foster carer experience. Expressions of interest to join your divisional group in July 2017 close 31 March 2017. See attached information on how to apply.

West Carer Advisory Group Update

The West Division Carer Advisory Group is working through their 2016-17 Carer Advisory Group Work Plan that includes the following priorities:

1. Ensure carers understand the impact of legislative changes regarding permanent care
2. Ensure foster care and kinship carers participate in decision making processes around the care of children, service improvements and reform activities
3. Improve communication and support to foster carers and kinship carers by child protection and community service organisations
4. Enhance recruitment and retention of carers
5. Ensure non-Aboriginal foster carers and kinship carers caring for Aboriginal children receive support, training and assistance

Two working groups have been established to progress the actions within the plan including a Child Protection working group and a Service Provider working group.

Contact: Sandie Mitchell, sandie.mitchell@dhhs.vic.gov.au

North Carer Advisory Group Update

The North Division Carer Advisory Group is working through their 2016-17 Carer Advisory Group Action Plan that includes the following desired outcomes:

1. Improved support for carers to undertake their role of caring for vulnerable children
2. Increased therapeutic support for children in home-based care
3. Improved educational outcomes and engagement for children in out-of-home care
4. Increased support for kinship carers
5. Increased sustainability of home-based care placements; ensure carers have the skills and experience to manage the children in their care; and ensure carers, as subject matter experts, are given the opportunity to contribute to the development of significant projects in a planned and well-communicated way.
6. Carers are supported to nurture the culture of the children in their care; Aboriginal children in care remain connected to family, community and country; and out-of-home care sector is better informed about Aboriginal culture, communities and ACCO partners.

In response to concerns raised regarding sourcing of important information for carers, the group has created a Common Questions and Answers document for carers with page links to the Handbook for Foster Carers and hyperlinks to Departmental websites and the Child Protection Manual. This document will be built upon by the statewide Carer Advisory Group Secretariats, after which distribution to agencies and carers will be discussed.

Recruitment for additional Carer Advisory Group members is currently underway, with a focus on increasing the membership of kinship carers and Aboriginal carers. Interested parties should contact Heather Pearce on 9412 5382 or heather.pearce@dhhs.vic.gov.au for additional information.

South Carer Advisory Group Update

Over 2016 the South Division Carer Advisory Group has focussed on foster care recruitment and retention. A working group of members developed a survey exploring factors around retention which was implemented with the south division foster care agencies. The main recommendations resulting from an analysis of the survey were for;

1. A statewide formula for counting carer retention, to be used uniformly and reported on a regular basis to track changes in carer retention, review effective mechanisms and to implement strategies where necessary and to develop a healthy baseline indicator
2. A statewide agreed exit process to gather data on what is leading to foster carers leaving the system.
3. A training and development strategy to support new foster carers

The survey has been shared with and built on by the other divisions. The results, analysis and recommendations have been shared with statewide out-of-home care team for review and consideration.

The South Carer Advisory Group has identified a number of priorities for 2017 for consideration:

1. Exit interview - develop consistent processes across divisional agencies.
2. Training - better targeted and more accessible for carers. Progress- The statewide kinship and foster carer learning and development strategy is a funded project being managed by the Foster Care Association of Victoria. The project is looking at issues raised by carers, such as different ways of providing training, improving access for carers to training and targeted training to meet carer needs.
3. Hotspots – collective data analysis to identify areas of focus. Progress- available data currently being sourced and considered
4. Education – engagement to identify how our children are faring in educational settings, identify opportunities for collaboration
5. Reform agenda – being kept up to date on progress and learning, being informed of practical opportunities to be involved
6. Young people’s voice – being directly informed by young people on their experience and needs
7. Carers’ journey – documenting the lifecycle of a carers experience via a Carer Journey Map – we are investigating options to develop a product identifying the journey of a foster carer from initial interest through recruitment, training and caring experience. Progress - Current focus is on looking into the option of storyboarding to develop this.

Contact: Michele McElroy, michele.mcelroy@dhhs.vic.gov.au

East Carer Advisory Group Update

The East Division Carer Advisory Group includes carers from across the division, representatives from local foster care agencies, and the Department of Health and Human Service, including Child Protection. The group, which has been meeting since March 2016, provides a valuable opportunity to identify areas for improvement based on hearing directly from carers.

The group is addressing four main priorities. These are:

1. better engagement with carers in the planning and day-to-day decision making for children and young people in their care
2. improved communication channels between carers, agency workers and child protection practitioners
3. greater awareness of the supports available to carers
4. improved planning around contact arrangements for children and young people in care

Key work is underway to establish a retention working group, to develop strategies to improve the effectiveness of care teams, and opportunities to promote and bring together carers and child protection practitioners during foster care week. The group is also considering ways to contribute to the Government’s Out of Home Care reform agenda, including support to carers and enhanced

foster care models.

If you are interested in hearing more about this group in the east or suggesting an issue or topic you would like discussed please contact one of your east carer representatives listed below.

Name	Email	I am a carer with
Georgina Harris	harris_georgia@hotmail.com	Victoria Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)
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Roger Burton	roger.burton7@gmail.com	UMFC
Tori Smith	tori.smith@anglicarevic.org.au	Anchor
Deborah Kendall	rubbygypsy1@hotmail.com	Berry Street Victoria, Goulburn
Julie Prentice	jprentice@berrystreet.org.au	Wesley Mission Victoria
Rachel Gray	rachel-gray@bigpond.com	UMFC