

Carer Advisory Group Updates 2016

October 2016 West Division Carer Advisory Group Update

The West Division Carer Advisory Group brings together carers, carer representatives, community service organisations and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to improve communication and promote service improvements for children in out of home care.

The group meets quarterly to provide a more localised opportunity to hear the voice of the carers and identify opportunities for the improvement of the foster care system.

An Action Plan has been developed by the group identifying six priority areas including;

1. ensure carers have an understanding of the Children Youth & Families Act (2005) Amendments as at 1 March 2016
2. ensure foster carers and kinship carers participate in the decision making processes around the care of children, service improvements and reform activities
3. improve communication and support provided to foster carers and kinship carers
4. enhance the recruitment and retention of foster carers and kinship carers
5. ensure foster carers and kinship carers caring for Aboriginal children receive support, training and assistance in the care of Aboriginal children and young people
6. ensure foster carers and kinship carers are supported through the transition from DHHS Disability to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

The action plan includes strategies and actions in line with each of the priority areas.

The establishment of the group provides the opportunity to bring carers, carer representatives, child protection and agencies together in a more effective way to improve the outcomes for children in out of home care.

For more information about the group or if you have an issue or topic you would like discussed at the group feel free to contact Sandie Mitchell, West Division Department of Health and Human Services on 9275 7145.

September 2016 North Division Carer Advisory Group Update

Key Achievements of North Division CAG:

- Carers from the North Division CAG made significant contributions to the development and content of the Home Based Carers' Manual and Charter.
- In the August meeting, carers were provided with information about the new DET initiative, Lookout Centres which are designed to boost the capacity of schools and out of home care service providers in responding to the educational needs of children in OoHC. The North Division will continue to work with DET to ensure a successful implementation of the Lookout Education Centre when it is rolled out in 2017.

The North Division Carers Advisory Group (CAG) brings together carers, carer representatives and staff from community service organisations and the Department of Health and Human Services (the department) to improve communication and to foster service improvements in out-of-home care.

Foster and kinship carers are at the centre of change for some of our most vulnerable children and young people. In order to improve quality outcomes for children and young people in home based care and allow for better placement stability, it is critical that carers participate in decision making and development opportunities.

The contribution of carers is invaluable and the effectiveness of the North Division CAG is due to the generosity of carers in volunteering their time and effort.

The CAG provides a collaborative setting to strengthen home based care with a focus on carer support, training and retention. The group is also working on improving communication between various parties involved in the care of vulnerable children and young people, by providing a forum for a structured dialogue for carers to offer feedback and raise issues on policies, protocols and practice.

From these discussions a shared understanding of common issues facing carers is emerging. The CAG has developed an action plan to progress resolution of these issues. Please find below a snapshot of the North Division CAG Action Plan.

- Outcome: Consistency is embedded into the practice and processes in out-of-home care and carers are better supported to undertake their role of caring for vulnerable children.

Key deliverable: Review existing resources in collaboration with carers and ensure carers have timely access to helpful information when they need it.

- Outcome: Develop local solutions to enhance the capacity of out of home carers to support children and young people with complex needs.

Key Deliverable: Issues raised by CAG relating to improvement in health and well-being will be included in work program of Improving the Health and Wellbeing of Vulnerable Children North Division Working Group, such as mapping of existing services and identify gaps based on issues highlighted by the CAG.

- Outcome: Improved communication channels between carers, CSOs and DHHS

Key deliverable: Develop a communication strategy to ensure broad access to the new Foster Carers Manual and to departmental factsheets on expenses and entitlements are clearly and consistently communicated to carers, Child Protection and community service organisations.

- Outcome: Therapeutic support for children is prioritised to provide an individualised response to the complex needs of traumatised children

Key deliverable: Map existing therapeutic support available to carers and provide information sheet to CAG and relevant community service organisations supporting carers.

- Outcome: Children's educational needs should be individualised and trauma-informed.

Key Deliverable: Engage with the Department of Education (DET) about the experience of carers in dealing with DET and how processes can be streamlined and implemented consistently across the division.

- Outcome: Increase the level of support and overall quality of kinship and foster care.

Key Deliverable: Local Engagement Officers will engage with community service organisations about how they will address support of kinship carers.

- Outcome: Carers are supported to nurture the culture of the children in their care and Aboriginal children in care remain connected to family, community and country.

Key Deliverable: Work with relevant carers and Aboriginal CCOs to identify strategies based on local communities' knowledge to address the cultural support of individual Aboriginal children and young people involved with child protection/out of home care services.

August 2016

August will see the 3rd Divisional CAG meetings and most have nominated a Victorian carer as the co-chair with DHHS.

15 August: North CAG - Fitzroy

17 August: East CAG - Seymour

18 August: West CAG - Ballarat

29 August: South CAG - Dandenong

All groups are working on a final draft of their action plan and will use their meeting for communication updates and to set priorities.

April 2016

Thanks to all the carers who applied to join Carer Advisory Groups. The Carer Advisory Groups have met for the first time in each division across Victoria. Attendees reported that the meetings were of value and informative. There were many robust discussions at each meeting, and a high level of energy and enthusiasm to work together to improve home based care in Victoria.

At the next Carer Advisory Group meeting, each group will discuss how their action plans will be achieved. Here is a snapshot of the meetings along with details of the second meeting dates and locations.

First meeting details

17 February: East CAG - Seymour

23 February: South CAG - Dandenong

26 February: West CAG - Geelong

29 February: North CAG - Fitzroy

Second meeting dates

18 May: East CAG - Seymour

23 May: North CAG - Fitzroy

27 May: West CAG - Geelong

31 May: South CAG - Frankston

February 2016

We are delighted to have received over 60 applications from carers to join one of four divisional Carer Advisory Groups (CAGS) being established across the State.

CAG meeting will provide a mechanism for consultation and engagement between carers and sector partners such as DHHS and Community Service Organisations.

Applications have closed and CAG membership confirmation has been completed, with inaugural CAG meetings scheduled in the next few weeks.