

COMMUNITY SECTOR NEEDS OUTCOMES FOCUS FOR KIDS

Professor Peter Shergold's final Service Sector Reform report will be released tomorrow, containing recommendations on how government and the community sector can work together to improve the lives of vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians.

Since March 2013 the reform project has consulted with individuals and organisations involved in the delivery of services across our community sector. A key theme throughout consultations and briefings has been the growing need for measurement of the benefits delivered by government funded services, rather than the current focus on outputs and process.

The Foster Care Association of Victoria strongly supports an increased outcomes focus, as our sector is currently failing to deliver adequate care to thousands of children and young people that cannot live safely at home.

As recently as yesterday, Foster Care Association of Victoria CEO Katie Hooper has supported a Victorian carer looking after a six-year old boy that has experienced eight different placements through his short life. Sadly, this is a common story.

The inadequacy of the community sector's support of these young people is clear across a range of measures. We must urgently improve the stability of out-of-home care placements, improve engagement in school and tertiary education, improve techniques to help young people recover from their past traumas, build their identity and enhance engagement with their community.

To deliver better results for these young people in state care, Foster Care Association of Victoria President Josh Fergeus is calling for "tailored individual packages that wrap around the child... this proven path to improved placement stability has delivered vastly improved outcomes for foster families, young people in care, and their biological families."

To ensure that these kids are offered the best chance of a safe and happy childhood, our community sector must be allowed to innovate and show creativity with the way we care for young people involved in child protection processes.

To improve the lives of young people within our foster care system, we need to begin by addressing the inadequacy of financial supports delivered to carers and agencies. Also vital is simplifying access to practical services and supports for these children that often have acute needs, while extending their access to assistance beyond their 18th birthday.

Ms Hooper has welcomed Professor Shergold's outcomes focus, with our system currently struggling to find suitable placements for the growing numbers of young people requiring care. She said that "we are losing carers because our system doesn't look after them properly... they need to have their experience and expertise respected as an integral part of the care team, and be offered adequate financial support to perform their role."

An expanded focus on demonstrating the benefits of community services will ensure that Victoria can better look after young people that rely on state care, and improve the disproportionately high rates of homelessness, unemployment, criminal offending and drug and alcohol problems currently occurring within this group.

It is clear that our current approaches to the delivery of out-of-home care are not working. We hope that the release of the final Shergold report will be the first step towards a more effective and client-focused community sector.

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