

2022

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

TENTH ASSEMBLY

APPENDIX A

A Step Up for Our Kids journey

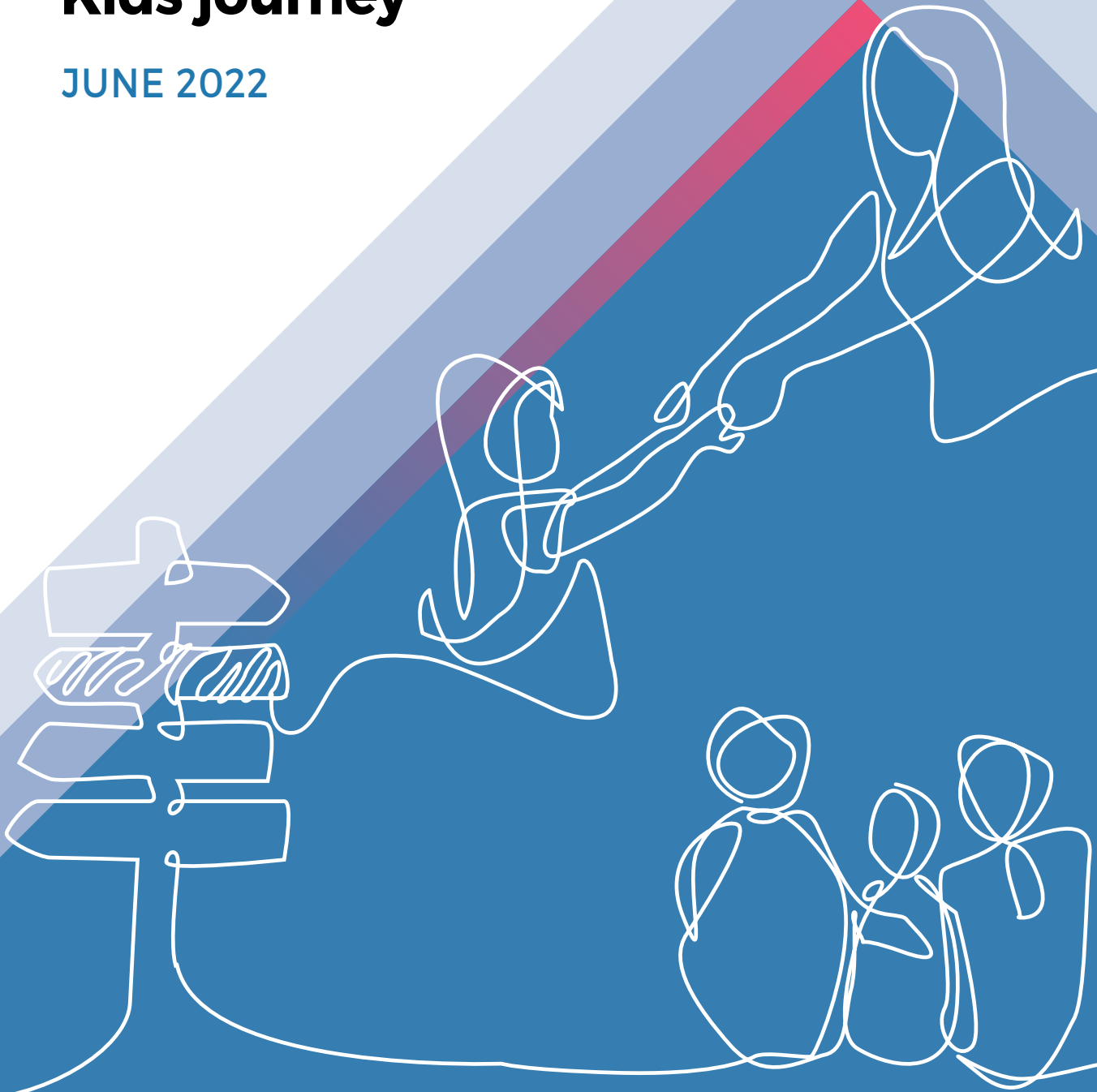
**Presented by
Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA
Minister for Families and Community Services
June 2022**



APPENDIX A

A Step Up for Our Kids journey

JUNE 2022



ACT strategy for strengthening families and keeping children and young people safe

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The ACT Government acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the Canberra region and that the region is also an important meeting place and significant to other Aboriginal groups. The ACT Government respects the continuing culture, and the contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make to the life of this city and surrounding region.

The ACT Government would also like to acknowledge, the value of traditional parenting practices and communal culture in child rearing. In particular, grandparents, aunts and uncles, hold a significant and respected position in families and play an important role in the development of a child or young person's sense of identity, belonging and culture. We believe that the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is a strength and protective factor in our work with families. We also understand that for thousands of years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, families and communities have provided safe, strong and loving care for their children, based on cultural wisdom, shared knowledge and traditions which uphold the belief that children have a sacred value to their community.

THANK YOU

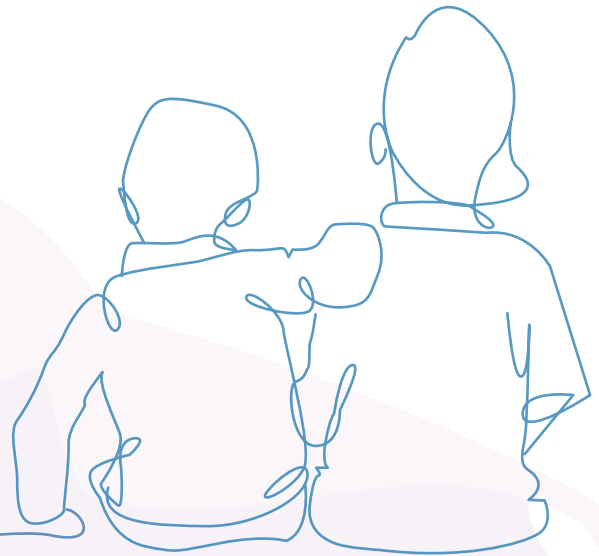
The ACT Government would like to thank the children and young people, families, carers and service providers who gave their time to provide feedback on the strategy. Their words and experiences will be used to improve the lives of children and young people in the years ahead.

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Introduction

***A Step Up for Our Kids Out of Home Care Strategy 2015–2020 (A Step Up for Our Kids)* was launched in January 2015 and saw a significant shift in how the ACT Government and community sector organisations provided out of home care services to children, young people, their families and carers. *A Step Up for Our Kids* was developed in response to continuing challenges in out of home care.**

“a significant shift in how the ACT Government and community sector organisations provided out of home care services to children, young people, their families and carers”

This document summarises the journey since the implementation of *A Step Up for Our Kids* and outlines what has been considered as we begin the next chapter: *Next Steps for Our Kids*.

The document provides:

- an overview of work undertaken to date
- a high level summary of some of the impact to date
- reflections of people with lived experience of the system
- references to some of the contemporary research that informs our work.

The document sets out the continuing drivers for reform and the challenges facing child protection systems. It also describes the contemporary research which demonstrates the ACT is not alone in the issues facing the sector.

The document does not attempt to outline all the research and findings to date and at times will reference other source material where more detail can be found.

What was *A Step Up for Our Kids*?

***A Step Up for Our Kids* commenced 1 July 2015. It placed a strong emphasis on preventing children and young people from entering care, reunifying them with their birth parents as quickly as possible and, where children and young people could not go home safely, moving them into permanent alternative family settings as quickly as possible. It was based on significant evidence based research and stakeholder engagement and was supported by an investment of \$16 million to implement and sustain the new initiatives.**

The intention of *A Step Up for Our Kids* was to improve outcomes for children and young people in care by providing more flexible, therapeutic trauma informed, child focused services, and to reduce the demand for out of home care places. It also committed statutory child protection and out of home care services to hearing the voice of the child or young person, better understanding their needs, and providing personalised services that could be scaled up and down in intensity as the child or young person's needs changed over time.

A Step Up for Our Kids delivered a continuum of care that was divided into three domains and held 29 elements (see Figure 1). The domains were underpinned by a therapeutic trauma informed service system and included:

1. Strengthening high risk families
2. Creating a continuum of care
3. Strengthening accountability and ensuring a high functioning care system.

A key focus of *A Step Up for Our Kids* was the investment in intensive parenting and family preservation supports to prevent children and young people from entering out of home care. The first objective when children and young people enter care was for them to be safely reunited with their biological families as quickly as possible. For those who could not safely return home, the focus shifted to moving the child or young person into a permanent alternative family setting as quickly as possible. For many children and young people, permanency was then achieved through long-term Care and Protection Orders, an Enduring Parental Responsibility Order or an Adoption Order.

To action the objectives noted above, *A Step Up for Our Kids* guided the commissioning of new services for families, new models of care and a range of advocacy and engagement services. The services focused on innovative and collaborative service design. The ACT Government and partner agencies worked together to create a more child centred and outcomes focused service system. Many external services started operations from 2016.



Figure 1: Original *A Step Up for Our Kids* service elements

DOMAIN ONE	STRENGTHENING HIGH RISK FAMILIES
ELEMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 Placement prevention 1.2 Reunification 1.3 Mother and baby unit 1.4 Supported supervised contact of children and young people with their families 1.5 Parent–child interaction programs
DOMAIN TWO	CREATING A CONTINUUM OF CARE
ELEMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 Empowering children and young people in care 2.2 Continuum of care 2.3 Case management 2.4 Outsourcing of kinship care for children and young people on long-term orders 2.5 Revised arrangements for reimbursement of carers 2.6 Supports for permanency 2.7 Extended continuum of care for care leavers up to 21 years of age 2.8 Salaried foster care 2.9 Therapeutic residential model 2.10 Independent advice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people 2.11 Child Health Passport 2.12 Joint Education and Training Pathways Initiative
DOMAIN THREE	STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY AND ENSURING A HIGH FUNCTIONING CARE SYSTEM
ELEMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1 Refreshed governance arrangements 3.2 Accreditation and monitoring scheme 3.3 Strengthened contract management 3.4 Performance based contracting 3.5 Adoption of the Out of Home Care Standards 3.6 Renewal of carer approvals 3.7 Improved information management 3.8 Independent carer advocacy and support service 3.9 Independent family advocacy and support service
DOMAIN FOUR	THERAPEUTIC TRAUMA INFORMED SYSTEM
ELEMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1 Therapeutic assessment and plans 4.2 Trauma Recovery Service—Melaleuca Place 4.3 Training in trauma informed care

The service providers commissioned under *A Step Up for Our Kids* were as follows:

- Barnardos Australia (Barnados) as the lead agency for the ACT Together consortium (including OzChild and the Australian Childhood Foundation) delivered a continuum of care including kinship, foster and residential care.
- Uniting Children and Families ACT (Uniting) delivered preservation and restoration services for families with children aged 0 to 12 years old.
- Karinya House for Mothers and Babies (Karinya House) delivered preservation services, supported restoration (babies under three months old) services, and provided short-term accommodation to mothers and babies.
- CREATE Foundation (CREATE) offered children and young people engagement support services.
- Australian Red Cross Society provided advocacy support services for birth families.
- Carers ACT provided advocacy support services to kinship and foster carers.

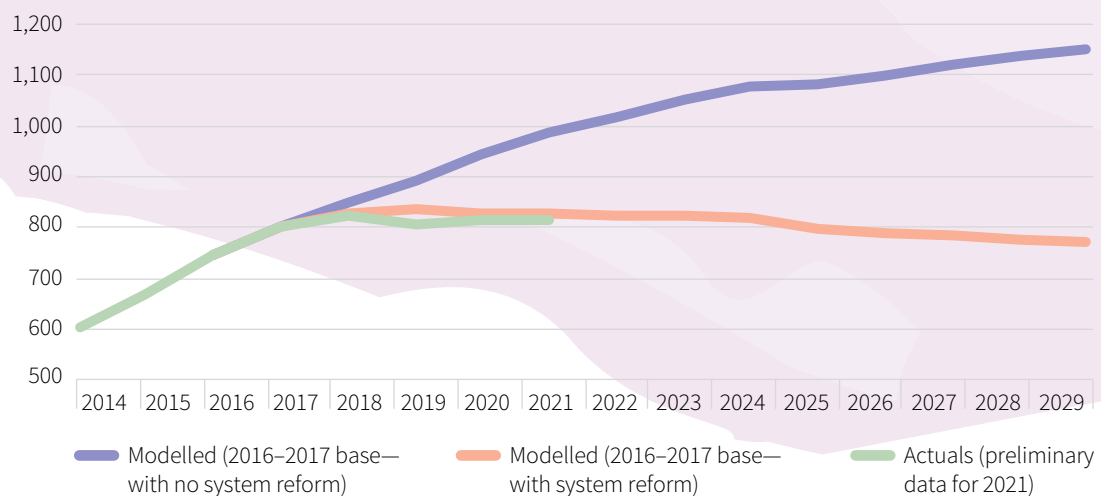
Following the implementation of these services under *A Step Up for Our Kids*, several additional programs were commissioned or operationalised to support the intent of the reforms. The Family Group Conferencing (FGC) program delivered by the ACT Government in partnership with Curijo, and Functional Family Therapy (FFT) program delivered by Gugan Guwan Youth Aboriginal

Corporation and Oz Child, allowed for additional culturally responsive services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Over the five years of *A Step Up for Our Kids* there were many achievements under each of the domains which will be discussed in greater detail below. However, one of the key achievements was the reduction in number of children and young people entering and remaining in out of home care. Figure 2 below outlines the predicted number of children and young people who would have been living in out of home care if the *A Step Up for Our Kids* reform wasn't implemented. It demonstrates that, on 30 June 2021, the ACT could have expected 986 children and young people to be living in out of home care. The impact of the reform meant 169 fewer children and young people were living in out of home care on this date.

Since its implementation, the ACT Government has undertaken several robust evaluations of *A Step Up for Our Kids* and has continued to engage with key stakeholders to understand the impact of the reforms on people who use the services. There has also been an ongoing commitment to review and refine policy based on contemporary research into best practice in child protection. This report sets out the progress to date, what was heard from service users and the continuing challenges.

Figure 2: Impact of the *A Step Up for Our Kids* Out of Home Care Strategy 2015–2020 on numbers of children and young people living in out of home care in the ACT



Predicted and actual numbers of children and young people living in out of home care in the ACT. Projections are from modelling conducted in 2018, actuals are from Report on Government Services 2021, all numbers are on 30 June.

What progress has been made since *A Step Up for Our Kids* was implemented?

What does the data show about *A Step Up for Our Kids*?

The ACT Government has been accountable for the progress and performance of *A Step Up for Our Kids* from start to finish, ensuring the strategy was vigorously evaluated at its baseline, mid and final point. Six-monthly reports were also provided to the ACT Legislative Assembly on the reform progress. These evaluations and reports have delivered a solid evidence base to inform future reform efforts in the statutory child protection and out of home care system.

The evaluations and reports are:

- *A Step Up for Our Kids Baseline Report*
- *A Step Up for Our Kids Mid-Strategy Report*
- *A Step Up for Our Kids Post-Strategy Evaluation Report*
- *A Step Up for Our Kids Snapshot reports* (June 2021)

The evidence identifies both positive impacts of the strategy and areas where more reform effort is needed.

A summary of the data findings includes:

- The number of children, young people and families receiving family support services has increased.
- The number of children and young people entering out of home care has decreased.
- The decreasing numbers of children and young people entering out of home care and the steady rate of children and young people leaving out of home care, has stemmed the prior trend for year-on-year increases in the

number of children and young people living in out of home care in the ACT.

- The age profile of children and young people entering and living in out of home care has changed, with fewer children under the age of five years old entering care and more children and young people in out of home care aged over 10 years old.
- The behavioural complexity and support needs of children and young people living in out of home care have increased.
- Placement types for children and young people living in out of home care have remained relatively stable, with many children and young people living with their families in kinship care.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are overrepresented. Around 30 per cent of all children and young people entering and living in out of home care identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. There is increasing evidence the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people entering out of home care is slowly decreasing and the number of children and young people exiting out of home care is increasing.
- Gaps in educational and other life outcomes continue for children and young people living in and leaving out of home care.
- The use of legal permanency options and different types of care have also not changed since 2016, with the rate at which Adoption or Enduring Parental Responsibility orders are issued, and the placement of children and young people in either kinship, foster or residential care remaining steady over time.

What worked well?

The implementation of *A Step Up for Our Kids* has supported a more integrated and sustainable child protection system. At the same time, the system has continued to evolve and mature in response to latest research findings on best practice and in reaction to local events.

The ACT community experienced devastating events leading to a greater focus on the impact of domestic and family violence. In addition, there has been a thorough review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people connected with the statutory child protection system resulting in the handing down of the *Our Booris, Our Way* Final Report in 2019. In response, the statutory child protection system has continued to put in place more actions that are leading to positive outcomes for children, young people, families and carers. Some of the achievements to date are listed below.

“a more integrated and sustainable child protection system”



1. STRENGTHENING HIGH RISK FAMILIES

Placement prevention services

From January 2016 to June 2021, CYPS made 666 referrals to Uniting. These referrals resulted in 456 families engaging with Uniting preservation and/or reunification services. Of these families, 135 (30 per cent) identified as being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Of the children and young people who were not living in out of home care at the time their family consented to engage with Uniting:

- 92 per cent had not subsequently entered out of home care within six months
- 87 per cent had not subsequently entered out of home care within 12 months.

Establishment of an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation

The 2019 *Our Booris, Our Way* Final Report recommended the analysis of an Aboriginal Child Care Association to determine how the ACT can support an organisation to fulfil the role of advocate, service integrator and work to respect and preserve the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families. A feasibility study has been conducted and as at the publication date of this document, the *Our Booris, Our Way* Implementation Oversight Committee is reviewing the options.

Reunification services

In May 2021, CYPS and non-government agencies commenced the Restoration Oversight Panel. The panel was established to prompt and trigger active efforts across statutory child protection services to embed a strengths based, motivational approach, focused on restoration to family and parents. Core elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) underpin the goals of the panel.

Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation (Gugan Gulwan) in partnership with OzChild offer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families involved with CYPS access to the Functional Family Therapy—Child Welfare program. The aim is to reduce the risk of children entering out of home care through culturally specific interventions that strengthen families to keep their children safe at home. The service is showing early signs of supporting families to stay together and remain out of statutory care. Since implementation of the Functional Family Therapy—Child Welfare program from 1 November 2018 to 31 December 2021, OzChild and Gugan Gulwan have received 120 referrals (families) to the program. Of this, 44 families did not commence the program and 76 consented and commenced engagement. Of the 76 families that consented and commenced engagement in the program, a total of 50 families successfully completed the program, with 11 families not completing. As of January 2022, 13 families were still engaged with the program and two working through the intake process.

Family Group Conferencing (FGC) began as pilot in November 2017 to help divert Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people from the court system and enable family led decision making to take place. Now in 2022, FGC is a standard offering by CYPS available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who wish to participate. As at the 6 April 2022, Family Group Conferencing had completed FGCs for 54 families (118 children/young people).

2. CREATING A CONTINUUM OF CARE

Empowering children and young people

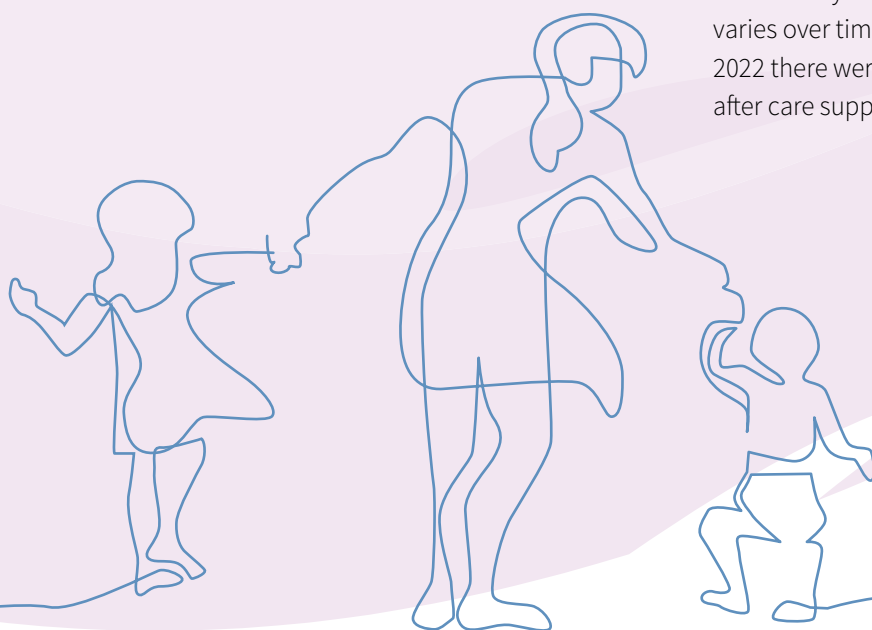
CYPS and ACT Together case managers work hard to meaningfully engage children and young people to help inform how they make decisions about their future. This can be through visits at their home or school, driving them to appointments, allowing them to chair their own Annual Review meetings or participating in the Viewpoint Survey.

In 2020, CYPS and Housing ACT established a blueprint for purpose-built residential care accommodation for children and young people in the ACT. The blueprint is the culmination of a co-design process involving young people with a lived experience of residential care, architects, subject matter experts and residential care staff. A young person with a lived experience of residential care has been engaged with the project since mid-2020.

Extended continuum of care for care leavers up to 21 years of age

The Extended Continuum of Care (18–21 years) offers an extended carer subsidy to support young adults and their carers, to ensure the continuation and stability of an ongoing care arrangement.

Aftercare Support for Care Leavers to 25 years is available to all young people in the care of the Director-General of the Community Services Directorate. After care services can include a range of support related to education, health, wellbeing, accommodation and financial support. While the number of young people accessing this support varies over time, as an indicator, in February 2022 there were 13 young people accessing after care support.



3. STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY AND ENSURING A HIGH FUNCTIONING CARE SYSTEM

Independent carer advocacy and support service

Carers ACT provides support to carers each year. During the period January 2016 to December 2021, 313 carers accessed this support. Of these, 140 were foster carers and 173 were kinship carers. The service is premised on supporting carers to feel empowered to work through concerns and issues with ACT Together or CYPs.

The Carer Wellbeing Sub-Committee is a shared committee comprising government, non-government, carer peak bodies and carer representatives. The purpose of the Sub-Committee is to support good governance of the strategy by providing advice and support on matters relating to foster and kinship carers.

Independent birth family advocacy and support service

In 2016, the Australian Red Cross Society (Red Cross) were awarded the contract to provide independent birth family advocacy and support. Red Cross provides a range of different services to support birth families including information sessions, support to prepare for Court and individual appointments. From January to September 2019, 127 families were supported by the Red Cross.

In consultation with the Australian Red Cross Birth Family Advocacy Support Service and the Women's Legal Centre ACT and Region, the CYPs redesigned the *Working Together for Kids* booklet into five individual guides for parents and families working with statutory child protection services.

Refreshed governance arrangements

The strategy's implementation was monitored through a three tiered governance structure. This included strategic, operational, and external oversight and reporting:

At the strategic level, a Joint Governance Group brought together the ACT Government and all funded agencies to ensure appropriate mechanisms were in place to guide the delivery of outsourced services.

At the operational level, four sub-committees maintained ongoing oversight of the commitment to carers, workforce capabilities, ongoing compliance and outcomes measures to inform the ongoing review of operational policy for service improvements.

Another addition was the inclusion of a series of practice panels, which increased the capacity of services under *A Step Up for Our Kids*. These panels were an opportunity for services to understand alternate perspectives and processes to strengthen practice and performance.

The Strengthening Practice Committee was established through the Safer Families Package in the 2016–17 Budget. Its aim is to strengthen the quality of child protection practice in the ACT and to foster ongoing improvement of the child protection system. The Committee is made up of representatives from ACT Government and independent interstate experts.

4. THERAPEUTIC TRAUMA INFORMED SYSTEM

Therapeutic assessments and support

Across the course of *A Step Up for Our Kids* children and young people in care have had access to a therapeutic assessment. Children and young people are supported to participate in this process in a way that suits them, and carers have been instrumental in the development and implementation of actions. In the period 1 July 2021 to 30 April 2022, 83 initial Therapeutic Assessment reports were completed for 83 children and young people, and 353 reviews of Therapeutic Assessments were completed for 348 children and young people.

Melaleuca Place provides intensive therapeutic services to children aged from birth to 12 years old in out of home care who have experienced significant trauma from abuse or neglect. Melaleuca Place has supported 134 children and their families since the service began in 2014.

A partnership with Australian Catholic University (ACU) since 2016 to develop a series of 'research to practice' papers which has made an ongoing contribution to improving practice.

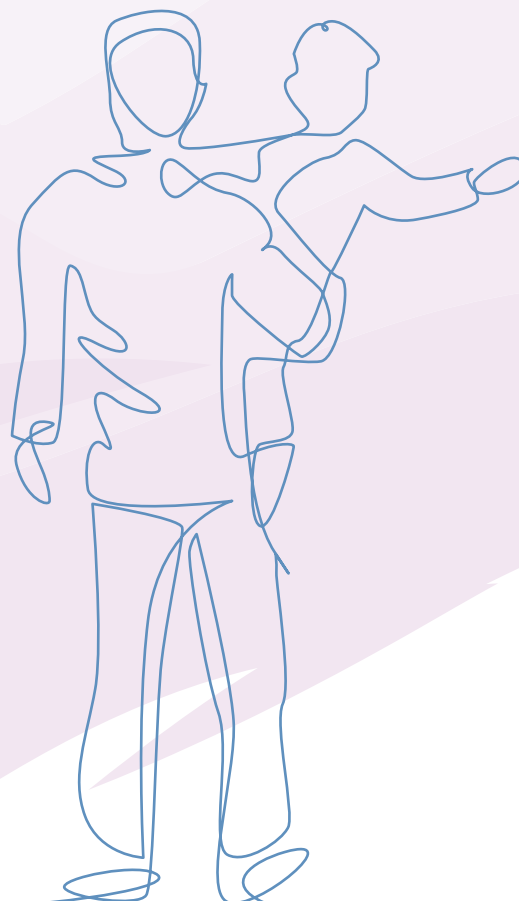
What were people's lived experience of *A Step Up for Our Kids*?

Across the course of *A Step Up for Our Kids* the ACT Government valued the continuing contribution from people with lived experience into the ongoing quality improvement of system and service delivery. Multiple activities provided feedback and led to service improvements across the implementation period of the strategy. The activities included:

- In 2018, the Carer Wellbeing Sub-Committee oversaw a Carer Wellbeing Survey of foster and kinship carers across the ACT system. The survey identified a range of issues for carers which have now formed part of the Carer Wellbeing Sub-Committee's workplan to pursue or remedy (Carer Survey, 2018).
- In November 2018, the ACT Government held a Youth Roundtable in partnership with CREATE, Youth Coalition of the ACT and the Australian Catholic University Institute of Child Protection Studies to hear the views and experiences of young people about case planning and decision making in out of home care. The findings were used to influence practice and policy.
- *Stepping Up for Our Kids: Real Stories of Keeping Children and Young People Strong, Safe and Connected* published in 2018, highlighted some of the impact of the reforms on people who experienced services and support delivered through *A Step Up for Our Kids*. The publication told the story of several key people who had experienced services through either CYPS, the ACT statutory child protection agency or by one of the commissioned service providers.
- In July 2019, staff from CYPS, ACT Together, Uniting, CREATE, Red Cross and Carers ACT came together to immerse themselves in best practice examples, explore challenges and

solutions and hear about child protection trends and initiatives from across Australia. The theme was 'Stepping with Dignity: Empowering Children and Families Through Purposeful Partnerships'.

- In September 2019, children and young people contributed to the design of a refreshed *Charter of Rights for Kids in Care* which was distributed to children and young people in care to help them understand their rights. Practitioners and carers were also given several tools to understand and discuss the rights with children and young people and to be able to act if they felt their rights were being violated.



What did people say about *A Step Up for Our Kids?*

More recently, the ACT Government sought to understand the experience of people connected with *A Step Up for Our Kids* to inform the development of the next stage of reform. The detailed findings from several engagements can be found in two listening reports listed below:

- **Stage One Listening Report**
- **Stage Two Listening Report**

Stakeholders were reflective and candid about what they felt had worked well under the *A Step Up for Our Kids Strategy*. Stakeholders stated that external governance arrangements with community sector partner agencies funded under the strategy delivered a high level of internal probity and accountability.

Stakeholders also identified that while there remains room for further work, the strategy has seen strengthened:

- understanding of roles and responsibilities
- sharing of information, risk and decision making
- shared practices in data integrity, education, training and record keeping practices
- shared understandings and common goals.

“external governance arrangements with community sector partner agencies funded under the strategy delivered a high level of internal probity and accountability”



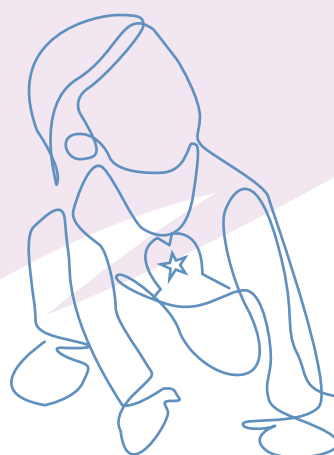
Seeking feedback and advice from people with lived experience of the system provided insightful and valuable feedback. This included:

- strengthening the voice of children and young people in decision making
- improving the experience of out of home care for children and young people
- supporting families earlier
- supporting family led decision making
- collaborative and transparent decision making
- increasing access to advocacy and support services
- strengthening pathways for children and young people to safely return home
- working towards care arrangements where children and young people can have safety and security
- strengthening support for foster and kinship carers
- improving residential care youth services
- strengthening the transition to adulthood for young people who have experienced care
- strengthening appropriate and accessible mental health, disability and therapeutic services
- building the out of home care workforce
- inclusion of restorative practice across the system
- strengthening accountability and ensuring a high functioning care system
- strengthening the child protection and out of home care systems
- maturing the out of home care policy and strategic framework
- using more evidence based and contemporary models of care.

Alongside seeking stakeholder feedback from services connected to *A Step Up for Our Kids*, the Minister for Families and Community Services hosted a Children and Family Services Reform Forum in 2021 to hear from agencies across the wider children and families service system. The Forum presented an opportunity for representatives from the community sector to connect with each other, discuss the significant reform agenda and consider how individuals and organisations can work with government to improve outcomes for Canberra's children and families.

Some of the key points identified were:

- greater focus on support early in the life of a child or early in the life of a problem
- greater government long-term planning
- more openness, transparency and accountability against outcomes
- better understanding of partnerships and what this means in a commissioning environment with shared responsibility
- strengthened family led decision making.



Drivers for reform

What are the **continuing challenges?**

While there is much to be said about the achievements from *A Step Up for Our Kids* there continues to be challenges and areas within the child protection system that need greater reform to offer the best outcomes for children, young people, families and carers. The challenges outlined here, have been identified through the data, feedback from people with experience of *A Step Up for Our Kids*, a stronger focus on evidence led models of care and current research.

In summary the challenges are:

- Continued poor outcomes for many children and young people in care and inconsistent action across the children and family sector to demonstrate child protection is a shared responsibility.
- Inconsistent inclusion of children, young people, parents and carers in decision making.
- Inconsistent use of restorative and trauma informed practices to put people at the centre of case planning and supporting families identify their priorities and outcomes.
- Many young people not accessing post-care options leaving them with poor access to supports once they leave the statutory system.
- Continued overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in statutory child protection and out of home care.
- Reducing the gaps in educational and other life outcomes for children and young people living in and leaving out of home care.
- Increased behavioural complexity of children and young people in care.
- Continued social and environmental factors that impact family functioning.
- Continued power imbalance between statutory service providers and service users and providers across the system.
- Families' intergenerational engagement with the statutory system.
- Investing early to further prevent families from coming into the statutory child protection system.
- Responding to the changing demographic profile for children and young people coming into care.

- Ensuring services are culturally safe and offer help in a timely and responsive way.
- A fragmented service system that doesn't always support shared outcomes for families.
- Availability of suitably skilled and qualified staff to deliver services.
- Lack of services for young people aged 13 years and over.
- Inconsistent service performance by many of the funded agencies.
- Establishing an appropriate environment to create longer-term strategic partnerships with all service delivery partners including government and non-government agencies across the child and family continuum to enable shared accountability and sustainability of the service system.
- The need to align the use of legal permanency options with more contemporary practice to deliver both stability and connection for children and young people on long-term orders.
- Ongoing and increased service system demand on the statutory child protection system.
- A commissioning and funding framework that does not meet the needs of those involved.
- Building a service system with greater shared accountability and stronger governance arrangements.
- Supporting a workforce that has a shared understanding of the desired outcomes and the skills and expertise to deliver. The existing workforce is marked by high staff turnover which is a demonstration of the challenging nature and complexity of the work.
- Understanding the impact of the COVID-19 public health emergency on families and further demand on the child protection and out of home care systems.

Also see the 2021 *What We Know Overview* that provides an overview of implementation data and identifies areas for the focus of future reform effort.

What is the contemporary research base?

There is a significant amount of contemporary research that sets out best practice to support systems to avert children and young people from care and build strong families.

A comprehensive practice review titled, *Out of Home Care Contemporary Practice Review 2022* sets out current practice and the models being used to support children, young people and families. The practice review draws on evidence from models across Australia.

Common issues in out of home care consistent across Australia as identified by the research include:

- Overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in statutory child protection and out of home care.
- Nurturing the spiritual and cultural identity of children in out of home care.
- Accurate data and data sovereignty for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Finding family in the first instance.
- The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) have recommended there is also a need for a focus on men as fathers and need to target boys and young men who have been exposed to family violence and do not have strong male role models in their lives.
- Organisational culture and cultural responsiveness in human services can take five to seven years to shift.
- Insufficient capacity to meet the quantity and complexity of cases in statutory child protection and out of home care.
- True views and wishes of children and young people are not captured effectively in decision making.
- Data and support for children, young people and their families who identify with a disability or need for reasonable adjustment.

- Interagency collaboration, sharing risk and responsibility across government and non-government organisations. The main system level barriers to collaboration include:
 - inadequate resources
 - different conceptual frameworks, aims and practices
 - different confidentiality policies and practices.
- A common language and operational definitions are one of the biggest roadblocks in developing collaboration and effective relationships in child protection practice throughout Australia.
- Unstable out of home care placements, poor transition from care support and poor outcomes for care leavers.
- Many children and young people in kinship care and their kinship carers lack allocated workers and support. Some Australian states do not yet collect data about the relationship (for example grandparent, aunt, older sibling) between children and their kinship carers.
- At the time of writing, no jurisdiction currently has a dedicated evaluation framework to monitor and evaluate post-care support for young people leaving out of home care.

A summary of the research showed the priorities of out of home care across Australia include:

- Keeping children and families safe.
- Reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the statutory child protection system and out of home care.
- Investing in Aboriginal and Community Controlled Organisations.
- Ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination.
- Early intervention and diverting children and young people from statutory child protection.
- Reducing the number re-reporting and the number of children in out of home care.
- Relational based, inclusive practice with families.
- More support for kinship carers.
- Aligning the work of family violence services with family support and child protection.
- Better use of evidence and building the evidence of effective programs and interventions.
- Improving workforce capability and cultural proficiency.
- Building a robust and coordinated community service system.
- Sharing responsibility across organisations.
- Data sharing, coordination and linkage.
- Improving outcomes for children and young people in out of home care and post-care.



Conclusion

This report summarises some of the strong evidence that has been collected over the course of the implementation and establishment of *A Step Up for Our Kids*. The evidence is drawn from multiple sources including evaluations taken at a baseline, mid- and end- point and six-monthly releases of snapshot data on the progress of *A Step Up for Our Kids*. Other evidence includes what people said about *A Step Up for Our Kids* including the experiences of people with lived

experience of the system. Finally, contemporary research into current practice around Australia adds to the evidence base.

Collectively, this evidence will help to drive reform agenda forward by identifying the areas to continue to strengthen and celebrate and the areas where there are continuing challenges. All this evidence informs and influences the ACT Government and community partners in shaping the development of the next steps.

