



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, AGEING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES
BEC CODY MLA (CHAIR), VICKI DUNNE MLA (DEPUTY CHAIR), CAROLINE LE COUTEUR MLA

Inquiry into referred 2017–18 Annual and Financial Reports ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Elizabeth Kikkert: To ask the Minister for Children, Youth and Families

Ref: CSD Annual Report, output class 3.1, Child and Youth Protection Services

In relation to: Permanency Outcomes

1. The government has committed \$3.46 million over four years to try to increase permanency outcomes. This is in response to the fact that out of 25 target permanency outcomes last year, only 16 were achieved. How exactly is the annual target reached? How specifically is it determined to be high enough?
 - a. A Step Up For Our Kids says repeatedly that kids should either be restored to their birth families or be put in a permanent placement within a maximum of two years. What percentage of kids currently in out-of-home care have been there longer than two years?
 - b. What's the target for permanency outcomes this year? If reached, will it include all kids who will have been in care for two years or more?
 - c. Besides the new staff in CYPs, what specific steps is the government taking to meet this goal of permanency by the end of two years?

Minister Stephen-Smith: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:–

The ACT Government invested \$3.46m over four years to continue to support an increase in permanency for children and young people, where restoration is not possible, through an Enduring Parental Responsibility order, or an adoption. This funding reflects the recommendation of the Adoption Taskforce Report 2016 that dedicated resources in the area of adoption and permanency were required.

The annual target is an estimation based on previous data and the number of permanency assessments in process. The actual number achieved during the financial year can be higher or lower depending on a range of factors. Working through the process to ensure adoption is in the best interests of the child takes time and is affected by a number of different variables.

These variables include the circumstances of each child or young person; conducting a permanency assessment to determine whether adoption or enduring parental responsibility is in the best interest of the child; parental consent to the adoption; the time taken to complete the work of preparing applications; and the processes of the Supreme Court.

- a) As at 30 June 2018 there were:
 - 592 Children and young people on Long Term Orders (order to 18 years)

- 88 Children and young people on Enduring Parental Responsibility or Family Group Conference orders
- 76 Children and young people on Short term orders (<2 year order time).

The intent of *A Step Up for Our Kids* or the *Children and Young People Act 2008*, is not to mandate permanency for children or young people to occur within a maximum of two years but to provide an option for timely decision making about a child or young person's long term care when reunification with the birth family is not possible.

Adoption and Enduring Parental Responsibility orders and the decision to consider these are defining moments in a child's life, as it is for the adoptive family and the birth family. Long term foster care placements can be stable and loving environments and any decisions about permanency is based on the individual circumstances and always considered with the best interest of the child at the centre. The *Children and Young People Act 2008* does not make permanency mandatory and children and young people who have been in care for longer than two years may still be restored back home dependent on the individual circumstances and where it is safe to do so.

- b) The Annual Target for 2018-19 is 25 permanency placements. This will not include all children and young people in care for two years or more.
- c) *A Step Up for Our Kids* is emphatically child-focused. Keeping children safe with their families, and restoring them home, is the primary focus of intervention for Child and Youth Protection Services. *A Step Up for Our Kids* is about reunifying children with parents as quickly as possible, or for those who cannot safely return home, finding a safe and loving permanent home with extended family or foster carers is the priority. This recognises the importance of providing secure, loving relationships for healthy neurobiological and emotional development, particularly in very young children.

ACT Together brings expertise in finding permanent families for children in out of home care. Child and Youth Protection Services and ACT Together are committed to finding permanent, loving homes for children who are no longer able to remain at home and are working actively with a number of families to progress adoption and Enduring Parental Responsibility assessments.

Decisions about permanency are life changing decisions and are not taken lightly by the Community Services Directorate, the families involved or the Courts, where final decisions are made. The best interests of the children and young people remain front and centre in making such critical decisions and are not dictated by the amount of time a child or young person has been in out of home care.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services

Signature:

Date: 27/11/18

By the Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith