



Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2023–2024

Answer to question taken on notice

Asked by: Mr Thomas Emerson MLA

Addressed to: Ms Gabrielle McKinnon, Senior Director

In relation to: Residential care facilities

Hearing: 19 February 2025

Uncorrected Proof Transcript pp 4-5

Transcript provided: 26 February 2025

Answer Due: 5 March 2025 5:00:00 PM

Ms McKinnon took on notice the following question(s):

THE CHAIR: Okay. I know that they are providing support and accommodation for First Nations boys. Do you know if we have anything similar for First Nations girls in the ACT or if anything is in the pipeline?

Ms McKinnon: So my understanding is that there is Narrabundah House and there is another property that they use for First Nations girls on some occasions, but really, I think there is a need to look at, really, the offerings for young people, particularly young people coming in and out of Bimberi what the appropriate residential facility or other options, you know, that we would be really looking at moving away from the idea of residential care being the way that we manage young people.

A lot of the young people we work with really want family. They want connection. They want to be in a place where people love and care about them, and that going in and out of residential facilities—you know, often, as Vanessa talked about, the sexual exploitation, sometimes that can be because young people are really looking for connection, but they are looking for it from adults who are exploiting them rather than—so if we can focus on other ways that we can protect and support young people who are at that point where they need somewhere to stay, but they need care that is therapeutic, that is really about building connection and relationship, not about a residential facility where they feel just one of many and staff come and go.

There is some residential facilities here that do great work within the constraints of what they have, and we work closely with the residential facilities, but really the model, I think, we feel needs to be evaluated, and we need to be more creative in finding ways that we can look after our young people rather than just build more facilities like that.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

MS BARRY: So currently, where would the—sorry, Chair. Currently if there is someone—say, for example, whilst we go towards that ideal model, where would those young girls go? Like, what is the current arrangement for—

Ms McKinnon: So I mean, there is a range of properties throughout the ACT run by different organisations that provide residential care. And so often young people, will be in the care of the Director General, and the Director General will arrange for a placement for a young person in one of the residential facilities.

MS BARRY: Okay. And that is not oversubscribed or it is meeting the need kind of?

Ms McKinnon: They will stand up placements if they need those. So young people are not being turned away from placements, but it is more around the appropriateness of those placements, who they are mixing with.

THE CHAIR: Can you provide a sense of the distribution, a general sense of these? Narrabundah House is one I know about because it is in my electorate, but of the facilities that you are referring to.

Ms McKinnon: Yes. So I mean, there is a range of different facilities.

THE CHAIR: Do you know roughly how many there are? Obviously, it is not my area of expertise, and I am trying to—

Ms McKinnon: I just do not want to be misleading, so if we could take that on notice so we can give you more detailed information.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

Commissioner Turnbull-Roberts: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

As part of the Commissioner's role in providing individual advocacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, the Commission is aware of and/or has visited at least eight residential care premises throughout Canberra that provide out-of-home care for children and young people. These facilities are for children and young people who are on care and protection orders, where parental responsibility is held by the Director-General. These facilities are not specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. Some properties will accommodate two or three young people, but other properties may only have a single young person residing in a placement.

We understand that the Community Services Directorate has contracted MacKillop Family Services as the primary provider of therapeutic residential care for children and young people in care. Bespoke placements have also been operated by organisations such as Capability Support and Strive. Some facilities provide care to younger children in care who have high support and care needs relating to disability.

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While the Commission is aware of particular properties due to our contact with individual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children residing there, we do not have information about the total number of residential out of home care facilities that are operated in the ACT and this does not appear to be publicly reported. This information could be provided to the Committee by the Community Services Directorate.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Social Policy

Signature: *Vturnbull-roberts*

Date: 05/03/2025

By the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner