

Review of Auditor-General's Report No.1 of 2013:
Care and Protection System
**Government Response to
Recommendation 4**
Progress and Effectives of Attorney-General's Report

January 2016

OCYFS Keeping Children and young people

Strong Safe Connected

Recommendation

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government report to the ACT Legislative Assembly, by the first sitting day in 2016, on the progress and effectiveness of the Government's implementation of recommendations, made in Auditor-General's Report No 1 of 2013: Care and Protection system, that have been accepted either in-whole or in-part. This should include: (1) a summary of action to date, either completed or in progress (including milestones completed); and (ii) the proposed action (including timetable), for implementing recommendations (or parts thereof), where action has not yet commenced.

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1. Overview

1.1 The Office for Children, Youth and Family Support

The Office for Children, Youth and Family Support (OCYFS) works in partnership with the community to protect children and young people from being harmed and from harming others. OCYFS also works in partnership with families, carers and community agencies to ensure children and young people are safe and achieve the best possible life outcomes. The OCYFS is part of a one Community Services Directorate (CSD) human services organisation.

Child and Youth Protection Services (CYPS) has a statutory responsibility to support children, young people and families requiring a care or justice response. In doing this CYPS works to deliver good client outcomes through providing a response that focuses on;

1. Diversion
2. Protection
3. Restoration
4. Transition and Permanency
5. Trauma Informed Practice

CYPS receive reports alleging abuse or neglect of a child or young person and assess the risks to that child or young person. The Service initiates applications to the ACT Children's Court for Care and Protection Orders if action is required.

CYPS works to prevent risk of abuse and neglect to children and young people and engages with a range of support services to divert families from the statutory system. Where children need to enter out of home care, the Service works with families to achieve safe restoration. Where this is not possible, the Service applies to Court for long term Care and Protection Orders.

Voluntary support and assistance is offered to young adults who transition from care to adulthood. This is done in partnership with community service providers and government agencies to coordinate service delivery. CYPS also works with community sector agencies to support families and prevent abuse and neglect.

CSD is committed to implementing *A Step Up for Our Kids-One Step Can Make a Lifetime of Difference*, Out of Home Care Strategy. The Strategy will prevent children and young people from entering care, reunify them with their birth parents as quickly as possible and, where children and young people cannot go home safely, move them into permanent alternative family settings as quickly as possible.

Table 1.2 provides a summary of action completed to date, either completed or in progress and the proposed action, including timetable for implementation for the four recommendations that were outstanding at the time of the previous Government response (May 2015). Table 1.3 and the remainder of this document deals with completed recommendations and goes to evidence of the effectiveness of services.

Recommendation 4

1.2 Outstanding Recommendations

Rec No	RECOMMENDATION	AGREED	GOVERNMENT RESPONSE	PROGRESS	TIMETABLE
1(S)	The Community Services Directorate should improve its ability to give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child and young person, by: (s) securing the support of the Strengthening Families Committee, to develop and foster the implementation of strategies to increase access to information for people from non-English speaking and culturally diverse backgrounds (High Priority).	Yes	The Community Services Directorate agrees it will continue to develop and foster the implementation of strategies to increase access to information for people from non-English speaking and culturally diverse backgrounds and will refer any specific strategies to the ACT Government Policy Council for review.	<p>The Strengthening Families Committee governance structure no longer exists. It has been replaced with the Human Services Blueprint as the overarching whole of government strategic framework guiding community engagement, community building and service delivery.</p> <p>The Working Together for Kids Booklet was developed in 2014 by Care and Protection Services in partnership with the Family Inclusion Network (FIN) and is being distributed to multicultural services across the ACT. The booklet is also available on the Community Services Directorate website.</p> <p>The Office for Children, Youth and Family Support is delivering information to people from non-English speaking and culturally diverse backgrounds through the ACT Government's three Child and Family Centres. The Child and Family Centres information flyer is printed in seven languages (including English). The Child and</p>	<p>Completed 2014</p> <p>Completed</p>

Recommendation 4

Rec No	RECOMMENDATION	AGREED	GOVERNMENT RESPONSE	PROGRESS	TIMETABLE
				<p>Family Centres also offer a range of multicultural parenting programs, courses and groups. Access to the Child and Family Centres continues to increase. 1,279 families accessed services in 2010-11; this has increased continually each year with 1,863 families accessing services in 2013-14. Child and Youth Protection Services will also continue to work closely with the Community Participation Group, Community Services Directorate to leverage off opportunities to engage with CALD families. For example through the Community Services Directorate staff at the National Multicultural Festival.</p> <p>An independent carer advocacy service and an independent family advocacy and support services will be established under the auspice of "A Step Up for Our Kids" out of home care strategy.</p>	<p>Family Advocacy Services commenced in December 2015 Carer Advocacy Services are expected to commence in February 2016</p>
2(c)	The Community Services Directorate should improve its knowledge management and decision making, by: (c) optimising the use of	Yes	The Community Services Directorate has a project underway to maximise the full functionality of CHYPS and scope further	A project has identified the priority improvements for CHYPS and these have been submitted to the vendor. These will be available in the 2016 vendor releases. Functionality on CHYPS has been reviewed.	Completed. Ongoing functionality improvements will continue to be delivered as they



Recommendation 4

Rec No	RECOMMENDATION	AGREED	GOVERNMENT RESPONSE	PROGRESS	TIMETABLE
	CHYPS functions so that its use extends beyond being a document storage system;		enhancements. Any identified additional improvements to CHYPS will be subject to budget funding.	Life chart has been added to improve access to information, communication events have been made simpler and the ability to record annual report compliance issues has been added. Ongoing upgrades will be business as usual.	become available.
3(h)	The Community Services Directorate should improve its governance, by: (h) formally reviewing the Demand Management Report on a regular basis;	Yes	An internal review of the Demand Management Report has commenced for 2013. The review of Demand Management will be governed through the OCYFS Executive team.	A CYPs 'dashboard' is in development to replace the Demand Management Report. This work is continuing. The 'dashboard' will provide real time data and information to support the management of cases.	Completion expected May 2016
6(b)	The Community Services Directorate should improve its management and quality control over out-of-home care community service providers, by; (b) continuing to replace the 2009 ACT Out-of-Home-Care standards with the 2011 National Standards during 2013 and having these notified under the Children and Young People ACT 2008;	Yes	The pilot ACT Out of Home Care Standards are currently being reviewed against the national Out of Home Care Standards and the national Standards will be notified under the Children and Young People Act 2008 during 2013.	A system for assessing and regulating care and protection (including out of home care) providers has been established through amendments to the Children and Young People Act 2008. The amendments commenced on 1 July 2015. The legislation now provides powers to enable the Director General or her delegate, the Human Services Registrar, to assess and hold organisations accountable against Standards in order for them to register and maintain registration as suitable for a purpose. The amendment will provide the ability for the use of graduated and proportionate interventions in instances of non-compliance.	Completed July 2015

Recommendation 4

Rec No	RECOMMENDATION	AGREED	GOVERNMENT RESPONSE	PROGRESS	TIMETABLE
				<p>Government has agreed to adopt the National Standards as the ACT Standards. The Standards support the objectives of the Children and Young People Act 2008 and the vision of the Strategy.</p> <p>Note the Standards will be notified in early 2016, following the passage and enactment of the Amendments Bill by the ACT Legislative Assembly. Notification of the National Standards as the ACT Standards for Out of Home Care will make the ACT the first jurisdiction to complete this commitment under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children.</p>	<p>It is anticipated that the Standards will be notified in early 2016.</p>

1.3 Completed recommendations

The most recent Government Response on the *Auditor-General's Report No.1 of 2013: Care and Protection System* was provided to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on 21 May 2015. At this time, of the 66 recommendation parts for which the Government was responsible 61 were complete. One recommendation part was not agreed to.

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts in its Report, *Standing Committee on Public Accounts Report No 15 - Review of Auditor-General's Report No. 1 of 2013: Care and Protection System* recommended that:

...the ACT Government report to the ACT Legislative Assembly, by the first sitting day in 2016, on the progress and effectiveness of the Government's implementation of recommendations, made in Auditor-General's Report No.1 of 2013: Care and Protection System, that have been accepted either in-whole or in-part. This should include: (1) a summary of action to date, either completed or in progress (including milestones completed); and (ii) the proposed action (including timetable), for implementing recommendations (or parts thereof), where action has not yet commenced.

A series of reviews into Care and Protection Services in the ACT commencing in 2011 and culminated with the Auditor-General's Report in 2013. Since this time OCYFS has undertaken a major program of reform, in partnership with key stakeholders, to strengthen service delivery and improve outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and their families.

To ensure the reform agenda is systematic and sustainable OCYFS has focused on implementing recommendations from the Auditor-General's Report through a continuous improvement program. The program focuses on the following key areas:

- Policy and Practice Improvement
- Strategic Service Planning
- Stakeholder Engagement and Feedback
- Training and Staff Development
- Legislative Reform to support System Reform

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts stated in their report that *"The Committee emphasises that it is the action taken by applicable agencies to implement audit recommendations that is all important, in helping achieve better efficiency and improving accountability of the Government, not the recommendations per se."* The effectiveness of the Government's implementation of completed recommendations is therefore demonstrated by projects and activities that have worked towards addressing the key themes of the report since 2013.

Table 1 below outlines how the recommendations inter-relate with the key themes of the OCYFS's reform agenda and projects and activities undertaken.

Recommendation 4

1.4 OCYFS Reform Agenda Themes

Policy and Practice Improvement	
Project / Activity	Recommendation
Care and Protection Services Integrated Management System	1a, b, c, d, e, f, g, j, n, q, 2a, b, 3a, b, c, d, e
Business System Improvements	1a, g, j, l, p, 2a, b, c, e, f, 3h, 5a, e
Strategic Service Planning	
Project oversight and Governance	3e, f, g, i, j,
<i>A Step Up for Our Kids – One Step Can Make a Lifetime of Difference</i>	1h, k, r, 6a, b, c, d, e, f, g
Integration of Statutory Services	1o, 4b, d
Early intervention and prevention services	5a
Stakeholder Engagement and Feedback	
Oversight - Public Advocate, Children and Young People Commissioner, Official Visitors	1i, j, m, n, 7a, 7b
Cross Directorate and cross government working	1l, 5a, b, c, d
Training and Staff Development	
Strengthening supervision and support	1q, 2d, 3a, c, 4a, c, d, e, g, h, i, j, k
Incident reporting and Employee Assistance Program	4f, 4g
Legislative Reform to support System Reform	
<i>A Step Up for Our Kids – One Step Can Make a Lifetime of Difference</i>	1k, 6a, b, c, d, e, f, g
Justice and Community Safety Directorate	8a, b, c

2. Policy and Practice Improvement

2.1 Integrated Management System

Integrated Management System (IMS) is the overarching term for the framework which the organisational policies, procedures, practice guidance, risk management and compliance requirements belong. An IMS framework aims to ensure this information is provided to staff in a coherent, interdependent and unified way so that service delivery is consistent, builds quality services, and prioritises activity which decreases risk and improves outcomes for the children and young people and families who CYPS staff work with.

Development of the IMS was a CSD Strategic Project. The project was monitored by a governance group, the OCYFS Business Improvement Executive and the CSD Board of Management. The closure report was submitted and accepted by the CSD Board of Management (now the CSD Project Board) in August 2014, with all project objectives achieved.

The IMS is having a positive effect on how workers undertake the delivery of their role. The IMS have assisted staff with:

- improving record keeping and compliance with legislation, policies and procedures
- having readily available, consistent and compliant policies and procedures
- access to tools and information workers need to make timely and consistent decisions about children and young people
- reminders in all tools about the importance of the voice of the child in everyday practice
- improved capacity of the Children and Young People System (CHYPS) data collection and reporting
- ready access to accurate information on each child or young people in out of home care
- improving quality control processes to check that qualitative information for each child and young person is available and annually considered.

The effective systems and process in place as part of the IMS are supporting staff in their decision making. In particular this investment is resulting in keeping children safer, as measured by re-substantiation rates. The CSD 2014 Half Yearly Performance Report, tabled in the Legislative Assembly in December 2014 showed favorable results across the Care and Protection measures.

The Report showed fewer incidents of substantiated child abuse and neglect and a significant reduction in re-substantiation rates within both three and 12 months. These positive results were also evidenced in end of year reporting. These favorable results indicate that once children at risk come to the attention of CYPS they are more likely to be supported to be safe.

A further example of how improvements to policies and practice is improving outcomes for children and young people in care is exemplified by the CSD Strategic Objective relating to stability of placements in care. Uninterrupted placements signal appropriately targeted intervention, stability and continuity of care and maximizes opportunities to achieve positive outcomes for vulnerable children and young people. One to two placements is considered desirable as a child may experience a short term emergency placement at the start of a period of care as well as a planned long term placement if necessary. Between 2005-06 and 2013-14 the proportion of children exiting care having experienced no more than two placements in care has been between 67 per cent and 79 per cent. In 2014-15 the proportion of children exiting care having experienced no more than two placements in care has increased to 82 per cent.

For further information on the IMS see the Government Response to Recommendation Three.

2.2 Business System Improvements

Work has been undertaken and continues to be undertaken to improve the current client management system (CHYPS), improve timely information reporting and to develop a new client management system for CYPs.

Functionality has been activated in CHYPS. For example 'Lifechart' (which provides a quick visual summary of the child's involvement with CYPs) and the way reports required to be submitted to the Public Advocate as per Section 507s of the *Children and Young People Act 2008* are recorded and tracked. The way staff can see and access information on CHYPS was also explored and functionally expanded to staff as appropriate. Many codes on the system were reviewed to ensure alignment with the IMS and where possible were simplified. Further functionality has been purchased and will continue to be implemented as it becomes available from the vendor.

Improvements made to CHYPS have resulted in streamlining of data entry, a decrease in administrative burden and increased functionality for CHYPS users and improved reporting from the system.

A technical expert has also been based within the IMS Project team. This has been effective in providing CHYPS users with further development and use of existing functionality to capture activity and timely advice and support.

The reporting systems in place to provide routine data reporting have also been improved. A number of data tiles containing information about children and young people's involvement in the system have been developed and made available to management and work is currently underway to further automate reporting making information readily available to managers.

CHYPS is a legacy system and while improvements have been made a new system is required. In the 2015-16 ACT Government budget OCYFS received \$2.772 million to develop a new client management system.

The new system will have the capability to integrate with information provided by out of home care agencies and aims to make important information about children and young people more readily available for foster and kinship carers. The new system will be designed for CYPS to move to electronic record keeping, and achieve efficiencies through the removal of administrative burden. The timeline for the new system to 'go live' is July 2017.

Policy and practice improvements are supporting CYPS in managing client information and making appropriate decisions for children and young people. Evidence of the effectiveness of policy and practice improvements is highlighted by the reduction in re-substantiation rates and the improvement in cultural case plans completed.

The proportion of children with a substantiated child protection report in the previous year with a re-substantiation in the next three or 12 months has been decreasing since 2012-13. In 2012-13, 17% of children with a substantiation in the previous year had a re-substantiation within three months and 35% had a re-substantiation within 12 months. In 2014-15, re-substantiations dropped to 8% within three months and 18% within 12 months.

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the care of the Director-General with a cultural care plan is also increasing. As of 30 September 2014, 87% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the care of the Director-General had a completed Cultural Plan. As at 30 September 2015, this figure had increased to 92%.

3. Strategic Service Planning

3.1 Project oversight and Governance

OCYFS has a defined governance structure for monitoring strategic project across the OCYFS. Strategic projects within the OCYFS are monitored by individual governance committees. These committees report, as required to the OCYFS Business Improvement Executive prior to reporting to the CSD Project Board (previously the CSD Board of Management).

The OCYFS Business Improvement Executive monitors the progress of strategic projects, concurrent with the CSD Project Board, and respond to strategic requests or exceptions. The OCYFS Business Improvement Executive has been effective in:

- monitoring and directing management action to relevant review recommendations;
- considering and deciding upon whole system reform issues such as ICT, organisational structure, change management, risk management, budget initiatives, savings implementation and wider resourcing matters; and
- requesting external support, as required, to inform the agenda.

Risk management plans and risk management meetings are routinely occurring within CSD. The CYPS risk register is discussed and reviewed at the monthly OCYFS risk management meeting and high and extreme risks are monitored by the Deputy Director-General and Audit and Risk Management Committee. Regular and routine monitoring of risk has been effective in identifying risks early, allocating resources accordingly and monitor controls.

3.2 A Step Up for Our Kids

The 2015-16 ACT Budget is providing \$38.9 million over four years to fund the out of home care system, including an investment of \$16 million in new services and reforms through the implementation of the Government's new Out of Home Care Strategy, *A Step Up for Our Kids-One Step Can Make a Lifetime of Difference* (the Strategy).

The Strategy is designed to stem the rate of entry to care through new placement prevention and reunification services; improve outcomes for children and young people in care; and place children and young people in care with permanent alternative families in a timely way. The strategy will see the development of a therapeutically oriented service system that provides a trauma related response to vulnerable children and young people.

Some of the key milestones implemented under the Strategy include:

- commencement of training in trauma informed care
- establishment of a Birth Parent Advocacy Support Service
- commencement of a new carer subsidy structure
- commencement of Therapeutic Assessments
- progression of three sets of legislative amendments to the *Children and Young People Act 2008*
- establishment of the interim Children and Youth Services Ministerial Advisory Council
- expansion of the Mother and Baby Unit operated by Karinya House.
- Procurement of a panel of service providers to deliver the 'Strengthening High Risk Families' and 'Continuum of Care' domains.

For the first time carers, families, and children and young people will have their own dedicated, independent advocacy support services.

The Birth Family Advocacy Support Service will provide independent support to parents with children in or at risk of entering the care and protection system. The aim is to empower families to effectively, and in an informed way, participate in the child protection process by providing information, advice and support to develop self-advocacy skills. This service will be delivered by the Australian Red Cross.

A new Children and Young People Engagement Support Service will be procured as part of the strategy. This service will focus on engaging children and young people currently in care, or those who have been in care, to enable them to have a voice in decisions under *A Step Up For Our Kids*. The Strategy will also establish an Advocacy Support Service for kinship and foster carers to provide independent support and advice to assist them in their caring role.

The 'Strengthening High Risk Families' component of the Strategy will deliver a range of brand new services to vulnerable families in the ACT community. These services will be delivered by Uniting NSW.ACT and will provide intensive supports to families with children who have entered care, or who are risk of entering care. The aim of this is to develop the capability of parents to provide a safe, stable environment for their children, diverting them from the care system where possible.

A priority in the design of Strengthening High Risk Families is that it is inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, appreciates family and community relationships and networks, and is appropriate, accessible and culturally safe. Uniting NSW.ACT will provide targeted services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders through their well established Aboriginal Services and Development Unit, Jaanimili.

New services will commence from January 2016. An initial 20 families will be referred to begin receiving services in January with a priority given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who have children in care or at risk of coming into care. Additional families will be referred to the program in February and March 2016.

As mentioned above, the stability of placements for children and young people in out of home care is a very important factor in ensuring positive outcomes for these children and young people. One way the Strategy is supporting and strengthening placements for children in long-term care is by building the capacity of the sector to provide trauma informed care. The Australian Childhood Foundation has been engaged to provide therapeutic trauma informed training to staff and carers. Foundation Training will provide strategies for working with children and young people who have experienced trauma and will be held throughout 2015 and 2016 as a four day course.

From January 2016, the Continuum of Care domain under the Strategy will be delivered by the ACT Together Consortium. The 'Continuum of Care' domain strengthens efforts to provide all children and young people in care with a permanent family placement, helping them to exit the care system and live a normal life. The 'Continuum of Care' domain brings together all of the service elements designed to support children and young people who cannot live with their birth families. It will reduce duplication in the role of government and non-government services, giving service providers greater autonomy and responsibility in providing stable, long term care for children and young people. The 'Continuum of Care' domain ensures that responsibility for the child or young person's experience of care resides with the one provider.

Development of *A Step Up for Our Kids* is a CSD Strategic Project. The project is monitored by a governance group, the OCYFS Business Improvement Executive and the CSD Project Board. The first program of projects is on track and close to completion. External oversight of the Strategy is also provided by the Interim Children and Young People Advisory Council. The Council provides expert, strategic advice to the Minister for Children and Young People on specific initiatives being undertaken under the *Children and Young People Act 2008*, with a particular focus on the integrity and fidelity of key initiatives relating to the operation and administration of the Act. The Council also provides the Minister for Children and Young People with independent strategic advice on the implementation of *A Step Up for Our Kids*.

The effectiveness of the Strategy's implementation will not be known for some time. However, services delivered under *A Step Up for Our Kids* will be monitored through an Evaluation Framework and joint governance arrangements.

3.3 Integration of Statutory Services

A key action in the CSD 2013-14 Business Plan was the creation of a single statutory service with integrated case management processes. The project was monitored by a governance group, the OCYFS Business Improvement Executive and the CSD Project Board.

This integrating the statutory services involved combining the functions of Youth Justice Case Management (YJCM) and Care and Protection Services into one service and included the implementation of single case management for children under the care of the Director-General, extending the approach YJCM had already successfully implemented.

The Integrated Statutory Services (ISS) project was required to support the continued implementation of recommendations from the Auditor-General's Report and Public Advocate Review and to improve OCYFS compliance to policy and legislation.

Additionally, it continued the work commenced as part of the OCYFS Structural Alignment and *Blueprint for Youth Justice in the ACT 2012-22* reforms, ensured OCYFS alignment with the *Human Services Blueprint* and was a foundational element for the implementation of *A Step Up for Our Kids*.

The objectives of the Integrated Statutory Services project were to:

- Integrate functions of YJCM and Care and Protection Services
- Implement a single case management framework
- Improve processes and remove duplication
- Increase collaboration across the sector and within CSD
- Lay foundations for *A Step Up for Our Kids* and *Human Services Blueprint* reforms.

Considerable time was dedicated to analysis, consultation and communication to ensure a sustainable change in structure, function and culture. Particular highlights include:

- Consultation and communication:
 - Implemented effective and consistent communication channels through feedback walls, newsletters, presentations, attendance at team meetings and intranet sites
 - Participation in workshops by staff and managers was consistently high. For example over 90 people participated in position description workshops
 - Open door sessions with Executive Director and Senior Director were well received and attended
 - Consultation was effective and transparent and resulted in positive feedback from the CPSU
 - Very accessible and visibly supportive executive sponsors with a clear vision for change
- Supporting managers to lead change:

- Commitment to ongoing training and coaching of leaders in facilitating change. For example monthly learning circles led by an external coach.
- Workshops with managers facilitated internally and externally to provide guidance on messaging, supporting staff and managing impacts of change
- Regular meetings with middle managers to involve them in the development and implementation of the change
- 100 day planning, five week and three month review workshops encouraged managers and team leaders to take ownership of the change, understand what was expected of them and what they should expect from their staff and provided an opportunity to build teams and manage risk.
- Service improvements:
 - The implementation of an online child concern report
 - Extended ordinary hours of operation for Intake (7am to 7pm) leading to greater employee satisfaction and ability to manage demand
 - Integrated case management framework that is applicable across OCYFS
 - Improved ability for Intake to work with voluntary and prenatal clients
- People Management and training:
 - Developed new forms of position descriptions that demonstrate key competency areas and show clear progression through levels. These position descriptions are now being used as a model by other parts of the ACT Government.
 - Job matching process provided an opportunity for staff to choose their work area and resulted in over 80% receiving their first preference.
 - Developed a career and training pathway with competence gateways for the Health Professional (HP) workforce.
 - Developed a transition training program and blended learning packages for ongoing training provision.
 - Reviewed and developed processes to improve retention through job rotations and clearer career paths. Implemented the roles of Principal and Senior Practitioner to support career and professional development.

The ISS project as a project has recently completed. The project closure report was endorsed by the OCYFS Business Improvement Executive and accepted by the CSD Project Board in December 2015. There is early evidence of both holistic and integrated services as a result of the integration of services.

3.4 Early Intervention and Prevention Services

Early Intervention and Prevention Services, delivered by the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support are provided through a universal platform with targeted services for vulnerable families.

Services provided include parenting information available online and through parenting fact sheets, sustained home visiting, parenting advice and support services, specialist clinical services, community development and community education. Services are delivered by the Child and Family Centres and Melaleuca Place in partnership with other agencies, local community organisations and service providers. The Child, Youth and Family Services

Program provides funding and works closely with community organisations and key government agencies to coordinate and provide services to vulnerable children, young people and their families.

Improvements in early intervention services have been effective in diverting some callers to community based supports instead of CYPS. This is reflected in the number of Child Protection Reports and Child Concern Reports about children and young people being received by CYPS.

As highlighted in the CSD's 2013-14 and 2014-15 Annual Reports, the results for the number of Child Protection Reports and Child Concern Reports received by Child Protection Services (now CYPS) were 23% and 22%, respectively, lower than expected.

These lower than expected results are attributed to the good work of the Child, Youth and Family Services Gateway; the Child, Youth and Family Services Program and the Child and Family Centres.

As referred to earlier, the 'Strengthening High Risk Families' component of *A Step Up for Our Kids* will deliver a range of new services to vulnerable families in the ACT community. The Government has commissioned Uniting ACT.NSW to deliver these significant intensive tertiary prevention services from January 2016.

4. Stakeholder Engagement and Feedback

4.1 Project Oversight and Governance

OCYFS continues to work with the Public Advocate, Children and Young People Commissioner and Children and Young People Official Visitors to ensure better outcomes for children and young people.

System improvements have been made to improve reporting systems and complaint mechanisms. The effectiveness of these improvements is exemplified by comment made in recent Annual Reports from the Public Advocate of the ACT and the ACT Human Rights Commission.

In the 2013-14 Public Advocate Annual Report the Public Advocate provided positive commentary in relation to the standards of Annual Review Reports, pointing to *"improvements resulting from the quality improvement process implemented within Care and Protection Services"* and a *"concerted effort made by the Community Services Directorate to meet the compliance requirements of providing Annual Review Reports to the Public Advocate"*.

The Public Advocate Annual Report (2013-2014) also noted that the improvements made with the new Annual Review Reports format (i.e. photographs of the child and a more child centered report) *"mean that those children and young people whose reviews have been*

subject to the quality assurance process will now have a comprehensive substantiated record of the events that occurred during that particular year of their lives”.

The Public Advocate’s 2014-15 Annual Report also provided positive commentary in relation to the standards of Annual Review Reports. The Public Advocate wrote: *“The quality of ARRs continues to improve. Many of the reports include a photograph of the child or young person with their permission. The language used to write the reports is more child friendly and many of the reviews include a comprehensive outline of the events the child or young person participated in during the review period. These improvements mean that these children and young people have a comprehensive report of the events that occurred during that particular year of their lives”.*

The number of complaints received by the Children and Young People Commissioner in relation to Care and Protection Services has been recorded annually in the ACT Human Rights Commission Annual Report. In 2014-15 complaints to the Children and Young People Commissioner regarding care and protection services are at their lowest since the Auditor-General’s Report into Care and Protection Services. In 2012-13, 48% (17 actual complaints) of complaints made to the Children and Young People Commissioner related to Care and Protection Services. In 2014-15, the Children and Young People Commissioner reported that 37% (6 actual complaints) of complaints received related to Care and Protection Services.

The OCYFS Complaints Unit was established in 2012 following a commitment by the Directorate in response to the Public Advocate’s, *Emergency Response Strategy for Children in Crisis in the ACT – Interim Report*. The Unit commenced receiving complaints in March 2012 and was fully operational by July 2012.

In its initial year (2012-13) the complaints unit received 123 complaints. The number of complaints has trended lower since this time with 85 complaints received in 2013-14 and 71 complaints received in 2014-15.

The establishment of the unit has resulted in significant benefits including improving response times, and the better resolution of complaints. The Complaints Unit has achieved this by:

- managing problems closer to their source
- ensuring there is consistent responses to concerns raised by children, young people, families and other stakeholders
- ensuring feedback occurs to operational areas regarding trends and patterns to inform quality improvements through training and policy renew
- committing full time resources to the Complaints Unit over the past 18 months and is currently increasing resources dedicated to the unit (Manager, Complaints Unit)

4.2 Cross Directorate and cross Government working

The *Human Services Blueprint* is a multi-year plan to achieve an integrated, cohesive and person-centered human services system in the ACT. The *Human Services Blueprint* outline’s how all human service agencies will work to collaboratively support children, young people and their families.

The *Human Services Blueprint* is the mechanism to achieve cross government and collaboration to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families. Three Better Services initiatives have been rolled out to test the effectiveness of the Human Services Blueprint in achieving better outcomes for Canberran's; the Strengthening Families initiative, Human Services Gateway, and the West Belconnen Local Services Network.

Each of these initiatives have established joint government and community sector governance groups under the broader direction of the Better Services Taskforce. All three initiatives have seen an increase in collaboration across government and community sector agencies, leading to better targeting of services to those most in need. For example, the West Belconnen Local Services Network has established a joint Network Leadership Group which has engaged with the community to identify local priorities. Work is now progressing to develop and implement locally relevant solutions, including improving early childhood development and strengthening families in the local area.

The Strengthening Families approach has been funded in the 2014-15 and 2015-16 ACT budgets, to provide intensive family support for up to 50 families. Since the expanded model commenced in November 2014, 54 families have been supported to access a Lead Worker who works with the family to tailor services to their unique needs. This has included over 250 individual family members with a diversity of needs spanning across the human services system.

An across government and community sector Advisory Group continues to oversee the implementation of the initiative, under the broader leadership of the Better Services Taskforce.

Over 150 Lead Workers from across government and community sector agencies have been trained in the approach, forming a community of practice to collaboratively build the capacity of the services system to meet the needs of complex needs families. Over 150 Lead Workers from across government and community sector agencies have been trained in the approach, forming a community of practice to collaboratively build the capacity of the services system to meet the needs of complex needs families.

A further example of how CSD is working across government to improve outcomes for children, young people and families is demonstrated by the implementation of the *Improving Educational Outcomes Committee for Children and Young People on Care and Protection and Youth Justice Orders*.

The Committee was established in November 2014 and is co-chaired by the Senior Director, Child and Youth Protection Services, CSD and the Director, Student Engagement, Education and Training Directorate (ETD). The Committee has been effective in providing a pathway for discussion, enhancing collaboration and identification of strategic priorities between not only CSD and ETD but also the out of home care providers and sharing information (within information privacy provisions) about joint clients. A focus for the Committee is the monitoring of enrolment and performance data for children and young people in out of home care.

5. Training and Staff Development

5.1 Strengthening Supervision and Support

Key to an effective workforce and improved outcomes for children and young people is knowledgeable, prepared and skilled workers. OCYFS has invested significantly in recent years in the training, professional development and supervision of its staff. OCYFS has a number of strategies in place to recruit, train and develop staff including:

- Rolling recruitment processes;
- Improved orientation and training
- Implementation of the IMS
- Nine days of training for all staff to support implementation of revised policies and procedures;
- clinical career paths;
- a Supervision Framework;
- Leadership Forums;
- Decision Making training;
- Mentoring;
- Development of frontline managers
- An additional Practice Leader to support quality practice

Examples of these strategies in practice include:

- During 2013–14 there were three separate Health Professional 1 (HP1) Pathway groups convened, with a total membership of 43 HP1 Caseworkers. Each group ran for 27 weeks and provided support and guidance to caseworkers in meeting their professional development needs.
- Team Leaders and Managers are being supported to build leadership confidence and capability to improve their support of caseworkers. This has included individual coaching and leadership workshops.
- A third Practice Leader position has been developed to focus on quality practice. The Practice Leaders provide new staff with high quality orientation and induction into Child and Youth Protection Services as well as developing training and professional forums for experienced Child and Youth Protection Services workers.

With the introduction of the IMS a total of 52 workshops were delivered with 1135 attendees over the period September 2014 to April 2015. Overall, this was a total of nine days training for each case work staff member. Attendance at sessions was extremely high and feedback was very positive.

A pulse survey taken of staff in September 2014 highlights how the training, development and supervision strategies undertaken have been effective in supporting staff. Results indicated that:

- 74% of respondents thought that OCYFS is good at providing training;
- 70% of respondents felt motivated and supported by management;
- 71% of respondents felt they received the support they need to do their job well;

- 71% of respondents felt that their team worked well together to deliver the best outcomes; and
- 79% of respondents felt that they had the tools and equipment they need to do their job.
- 94% of respondents felt that they understood how the IMS Knowledge Portal would affect their day-to-day work;
- 92% of respondents felt that the IMS Knowledge Portal had improved the way they worked;

5.2 Incident Reporting and Employee Assistance

According to the Auditor-General's Report *...there were only 19 recorded incidents of threat to front line staff in the Care and Protection Services Branch reported during three years, 2009-12*. Since this time OCYFS and the CSD People Management Branch have worked together to educate staff on reporting of incidents and change the service culture. In 2014-15 Child and Youth Protection Services made a total of 545 reports made to the ACT Insurance Agency (ACTIA). It is noted that there were no claims made against the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support during the same period.

In August 2014, the Directorate introduced online work injury reporting (formerly Accident and Incident Reporting), using the RiskMan system to support the recording, investigation and reporting of injuries and safety incidents occurring at CSD worksites.

CSD uses Converge International to provide EAP and Manager Assist Services to directorate staff and their immediate family members. CSD's People Management team has been working actively with the OCYFS Executive Team and Health and Safety Representatives to promote and encourage utilization of Employee Assistance Program services.

6. Legislative Reform to support System Reform

6.1 Legislative Amendments

Amendments to the *Children and Young People Act 2008* through the *Children and Young People Amendment Bill 2015 (2)* were passed in the ACT Legislative Assembly on 4 June 2015 to provide powers for a regulatory system including: the ongoing monitoring of an organisation's suitability; intervention when existing or emerging risks are identified; and tools for working with approved organisations to develop a consistent, high quality service system that is responsive, innovative and achieves the best outcomes for its service users. This regulator is known as the Human Services Registrar.

Thirty-two (32) community organisations have applied to be approved as a suitable entity. For regulatory purposes, these organisations are referred to as Community Care and Protection Services. This term acknowledges their increased role and responsibility for service provision under the Strategy, and their integration and partnership with the government provider in meeting the needs of these children, young people and their families.

The Human Services Registrar has been effective in proving management and quality control over out of home care community services providers, independent of OCYFS.

The *Children and Young People Amendment Bill (No 3)* was debated and passed in the ACT Legislative Assembly on 29 October 2015 and the amended *Children and Young People Act 2008* was notified on 5 November 2015.

Amendments to the *Children and Young People Act 2008* were needed to enable the new services under *A Step Up for Our kids*; to give vulnerable children and young people the most stable, productive lives possible. These amendments will enable (1k):

- More decision making for those closer to a child or young person, such as the out of home care agency and carer;
- Earlier consideration of permanency;
- Simplification of the approval process for carers; and
- Better support for carers with a young person age 18 to 21 in their care.

6.2 Justice and Community Safety Directorate

See Government Response to Recommendation One and Two of *the Standing Committee on Public Accounts Review of Auditor-General's Report No1 of 2013: Care and Protection System*.

7. Closing Statement

The work undertaken by OCYFS and more broadly by CSD is achieving a well planned service system, with skilled staff who are child centered and are supported by a clear and accessible legislative and policy framework to deliver quality better services to vulnerable children and young people in the act at “the right time in the right place for the right duration.”

By its nature continuous improvement means there is always work to be done, that’s why OCYFS will deliver a continuous improvement program going forward to further embed new changes, improve quality services, support staff and most importantly ensure that vulnerable children and young people in the ACT are safe, strong and connected.