



The result we want:

For every kid in out-of-home care to have the opportunity to realise their potential

Every kid... deserves the opportunity to thrive.

The situation we face

There are significant numbers of children and young people in out-of-home care in NSW. Studies have shown that children in both kinship care and foster care have poorer health, social and educational outcomes than children in the general population.¹

At 30 June 2005:

- 10,041 children and young people in NSW were in out-of-home care.²
- More than half of these children were in kinship or relative care.³

Various studies which have looked at outcomes for children and young people in care have had concerning findings. For instance:

- 80% of young people living at home with their families in NSW complete their HSC compared to only 35.6% of young people in care.⁴
- Just under half of young people in care were unemployed 12 months after leaving care.⁵
- One in three young women were pregnant or had a child soon after leaving care.⁶
- Various Australian studies have found a disproportionate link between youth homelessness and care backgrounds.
- Children in out-of-home care are likely to have poorer physical, mental and developmental health than their peers.⁷

What can be done

The NSW Government can:

- Commit to a Guarantee for all children and young people in care:

The Guarantee would acknowledge that if the State is to fulfil its role as a “good parent” then it must provide to children and young people in care those things that a good parent would be expected to provide. The Guarantee should encompass four key areas:

- education
- health
- transition to independence (access to housing, further education and/or employment) and
- the pursuit of opportunities and interests.

In each of these areas the government needs to provide high quality coordinated and individually tailored services for children and young people up to the age of 25.

Improvements in the provision of these services would be achieved by increasing funding to expand existing services and establish new services (eg health screening, educational support, independent living skill training). In addition the Guarantee would give children and young people in out-of-home care priority access to relevant government and non-government services in areas such as health and housing. The Guarantee would ensure services that are equitable, accessible and consistently available throughout the state.

- Increase the availability and accessibility of supports and services, including the level of financial assistance available to kinship and relative carers when required. A demand-based system of support services should be available to kinship carers when the need arises. This could include a 24-hour hotline for immediate counselling and casework assistance for kinship carers.
- Fund at least one family out-of-home care program for children with disability, including shared care for each region in NSW.



Endnotes

- 1 Richardson N, Bromfield L, Higgins D. 2005 *The Recruitment, Retention and Support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Foster Carers: A Literature Review*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, National Child Protection Clearinghouse, p47.
- 2 NSW Department of Community Services. 2006 *Annual Statistical Report 2004/05*, Out-of-home care, Ashfield, p46.
- 3 NSW Department of Community Services. 2006 *Annual Statistical Report 2004/05*, Out-of-home care, Ashfield, p45.
- 4 Cashmore J and Paxman M. 1996 cited by CREATE Foundation, *Australian Children and Young People in Care, Report Card Education*, December 2004, p 7.
- 5 Cashmore J and Paxman M. 1996 *Longitudinal study of wards leaving care*. Social Policy Research Centre. Sydney, executive summary.
- 6 Mendes, P & Moslehuddin B. 2004. *Graduating from the child welfare system: a comparison of the UK and Australian leaving care debates*, International Journal of Social Welfare, 13, Blackwell Publishing p334.
- 7 The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP). 2006. *Health of Children in "out-of-home" care*, Sydney p5.