



Children in Care Collective

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Members of the Children in Care Collective with Robert Fitzgerald

Left to right front; Gillian Calvert (Life Without Barriers Board Member), Claire Rodd (CEO Life Without Barriers and Chair of the CCC), Sue Madden (Anglicare Sydney); Jenny Kitchin (Anglicare NSW South, NSW West and ACT), Left to right back; Rob Ryan (Key Assets), Robert Fitzgerald, Greg Mills (Board Member, Anglicare NSW South, NSW West and ACT), Jamie Hodgson (Key Assets), Rod Best (Life Without Barriers)

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THE GOALS OF THE CHILDREN IN CARE COLLECTIVE

This is the second Bulletin for the Children in Care Collective. The Children in Care Collective was formed in 2016 by a group of out of home care service providers and leading experts in the field, from across Australia working with children with complex needs. The aim of the Collective is to share information and work collaboratively and proactively on issues concerning these children. The voice of the young person is paramount to the work of the Collective.

The goals of the Collective are to;

- Build our practice capabilities
- Partner with others to improve outcomes in the out of home care service system
- Create a positive voice for children and young people in care with complex needs

The members of the Collective provide expertise in the field



of out of home care providing valuable practitioner knowledge and adding value to the system through dialogue and problem solving. Over the last two years the Collective has been looking at solutions to some of the difficult systemic practice issues faced by the sector. The Collective has done this by using evidenced based practice, drawing on the lessons learnt by the each agency and engaging with relevant academics. The Collective meets every two months and have identified practice topics to be discussed at each of these meetings in 2018. The Collective has agreed to target issues that will genuinely lift agency capability beyond anything that could be achieved as a sole agency. The issues identified are systemic practice issues, difficult issues that could benefit from the Collective's reflection.

ROBERT FITZGERALD PRESENTS; INSIGHTS INTO THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CHILD ABUSE: IF ONLY WE HAD LISTENED TO THE CHILDREN



Robert Fitzgerald attended the Children in Care Collective April meeting. Robert was one of the Royal Commissioner's looking into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse. Robert facilitated a thought provoking and practical discussion, and shared some of his insights and observations about the Commission's processes, key findings and implications for organisations working with children and young people. Robert spoke about how to operationalise the recommendations and make structural changes to ensure the intent of the recommendations are embedded in organisations.

Below is a summary of this discussion.

Overview

The Royal Commission was five years in the making. The outcome was over 50 case studies and 100 pieces of commissioned research, with

the final Report based on a large body of evidence. The report covers four target areas;

1. Community
2. States and territories
3. Industry sectors i.e. OOHC, schools
4. Specific institutions i.e. the Catholic Church, YMCA, Scouts

Over the period that the Commission was conducted, there were significant changes made to the practices and policies of major institutions who were the subject of the Commission's review. This is a fairly unique outcome for a Commission in Australia, as the extended time of the Commission allowed for these changes to occur and to be seen. One of the key messages to emerge from the Commission was 'if only we had listened to children'. If only we had listened children and young people would not have been

subject to multiple occasions where their integrity was challenged and also children and young people could have told us what we needed to do.

Bullying

The Commission reviewed many cases where bullying was central to organisational practice within institutions. Where bullying of staff and others occurred at the top of an organisation this gave permission for all the other levels to also practice bullying. In these organisations where leaders were bullies, staff members bullied each other and also the children in their care. Children and/or their parents were also bullied out of reporting abuse, especially in organisations where avoiding reputational damage was considered paramount.

Bullying, domestic violence and sexual violence are often linked in the lives of a victim. If we reduce bullying and domestic violence it is very likely we will reduce sexual abuse, especially in institutions.

Interestingly, in research conducted for the Royal Commission children indicated that before they would disclose abuse they looked to see how the institution dealt with bullying. If an organisation doesn't deal well with bullying then they felt it unsafe to disclose abuse.

Understanding Children's Vulnerabilities

One of the greatest lessons to emerge from the Commission was the need for people to listen to children, and not just superficially. To truly listen requires a clear understanding of the children in an organisation's care. Understanding their vulnerabilities allows for protective practices to be developed. Commonly these vulnerabilities are seen as emerging from;

- Previous maltreatment
- Having a low level of self-esteem
- Subjected to bullying
- Disability (and commonly undiagnosed disabilities such as dyslexia/ADHD)
 - » Often these children become the 'troublesome child'



But there can also be others that are less often recognised, such as the vulnerability of the high performer. These ambitious children were vulnerable because of their desire to achieve. This vulnerability was utilised by perpetrators; coaches, teachers and trainers, with the ever present threat where explicitly or implicitly stated 'I'll destroy your career'.

For many who were abused they did not understand that what was happening was wrong. They didn't have the knowledge or language to articulate what was happening to them. Enhancing a child's knowledge, providing safe persons and places to disclose, giving them a voice are all part of providing a protective environment. Educating adults about what is acceptable or unacceptable conduct is also critical. This is very much the case in relation to harmful sexual behaviours by children. The traffic light system is one example of an educative tool.

Nature of Perpetrators

The Commission found that there were a number of ways in which perpetrators present;

- a) Persistent perpetrators;
 - Choose their work environment so they can be close to children
 - Have a predisposition to have sex with children
 - What we understand as a ‘genuine paedophile’
- b) Opportunistic perpetrators;
 - As a result of having constant access to children and young people seek sexual gratification
 - In other environments they may not have been a perpetrator and do not seek out children generally.
- c) Sexually and emotionally immature;
 - Sexual and human development has been stunted and they seek intimacy in children
 - Situational relationships, the perpetrator forms a ‘loving’ relationship that can persist for many years even after the childhood abuse and continue into adulthood.

Understanding the possible types of perpetrators is important, holding a stereotypical view of what a ‘true’ paedophile is, can mean the behaviour can be missed. Often also the perpetrator is charismatic, popular and has built trust. Perpetrators are experts in grooming children, families and colleagues.

There are a series of common reactions to a report of abuse of a family member or colleague.

1. That’s impossible he’s such a good person
2. She/he (the child) is always making up stories
3. I always knew he was a little bit funny
4. I always knew he was evil and is definitely guilty

Each of these in their own way distort the proper investigation of matters to protect children. Personal views contributed to the very poor handling of many matters. Instead having appropriate procedures in place and consistent, child friendly and robust investigation mechanisms are critical. It is incumbent on Boards, managers and staff to become

knowledgeable about good complaint processes, recognise that personality can influence how the reporter or the child is believed, together with other factors that can greatly distort an investigation. Mandatory reporting both for child protection and criminal purposes and reportable conduct regimes seek to remove the element of a person’s own opinion, by requiring action to be taken irrespective of one’s own view.

Proper systems and processes are required. Quite often processes break down because people are not clear on what is required; what do I do, who can I speak with? Complicated policies that gather dust on a shelf are not the solution, as there is a great risk that staff will still not understand what to do. There is a need for all to have a working knowledge of what is required based around the principle of acting in the best interest of the child. Scenario planning, examining possible adverse events etc best prepare staff for such eventualities.

How do you maintain the focus and effort of on this issue?

You need to make this core business, formalise the issue through processes such as standing items on board and risk committee agendas, as happens with a finance or workplace safety reporting.



There needs to be feedback loops from management to the Board regularly. Using existing structures to make reporting on this issue 'habit forming' will help to embed this issue into the culture of an organisation.

To drive and sustain a commitment to a child safe environment Boards and Chief Executives need to fully embrace a culture that seeks to act in the best interests of children above all other considerations. They need to engage staff, parents, carers and children in a conversation about these issues and thus build a community of shared knowledge and commitment. They

need to embrace best practice approaches in recruitment, screening, training and professional development of all personnel including board members.

Further, conducting client surveys for staff, kids, and families can provide valuable feedback. Ask questions such as:

- ▶ What makes you feel safe?
- ▶ Where do you feel safe?
- ▶ (for staff) Have we helped our clients feel and be safe?

CHILDREN IN CARE COLLECTIVE RESPONSE TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION

In February this year the Collective wrote the Prime Minister and Premiers/Chief Ministers in each state and territory, about the final report from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse, released on 15 December 2017. This letter was to inform each jurisdiction of the Collective's interest in specific recommendations from the report and indicate our willingness to provide input into the local responses being developed.

The Collective has received notices of

acknowledgment from each of the jurisdictions and NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) invited the Collective to meet with their team responsible for developing the NSW response to the report on Thursday 12 April. At this meeting the staff in DPC expressed their eagerness to understand the practical implications of the recommendations, and have also committed to engaging with the Collective to test approaches once the process of implementing the recommendations from June 2018 becomes clear.

POLICY FORUM SYDNEY POLICY LAB

On 29 March 2018 the Collective in partnership with the Sydney Policy Lab, University of Sydney, held the 'Children in Care' policy forum. The forum was hosted by Jenny Mason and over 50 participants including academics, service providers (including Collective member agencies) and bureaucrats from across Australia took part in an interactive discussion. At the start of the forum a welcome to country was given by Anne Weldon, Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council. Anne provided a challenge to the group to understand the difference that service



Dr Jenny Mason, Policy Forum Facilitator

providers can make, but also the possible damage that can be done to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care. It was a fitting introduction and set the tone for the day, and the discussion topics.

The Collective identified four critical policy topics that required greater examination and

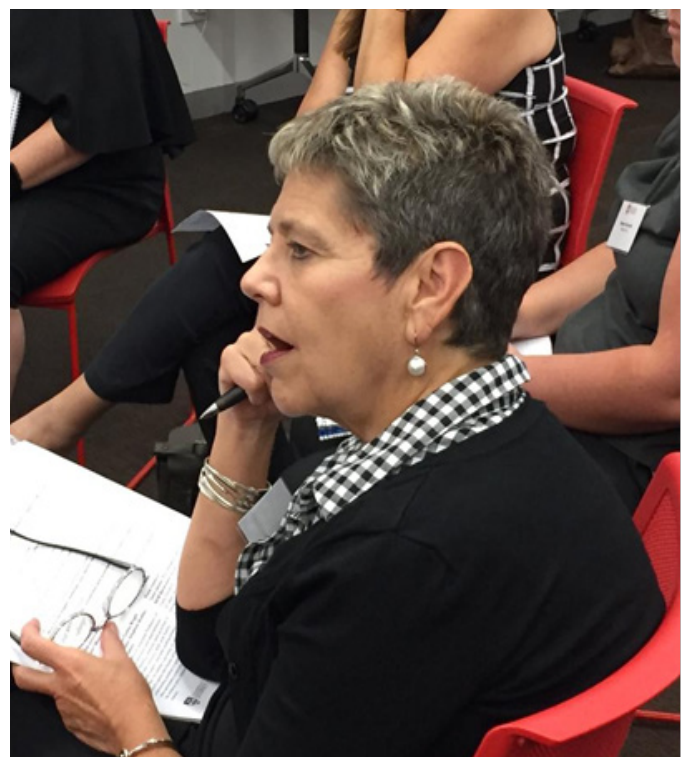
change. At the forum small groups were formed to discuss these topics. These discussions helped to improve our understanding of what we know now and what more we need to know. The groups also identified strategies to improve service providers and governments engagement to address these critical issues.

Support needs and services following permanency placements	Returning children to Aboriginal community controlled organisations	Children with harmful sexual behaviours	Establishing a professional paid OOHC workforce
<p>Facilitators Amy Conley Wright Director, Institute of Open Adoption Studies, The University of Sydney</p> <p>Fiona Cameron Team Leader PARC, Benevolent Society NSW</p>	<p>Facilitator Paul Grey Executive Leader, Strategy, Policy and Engagement, AbSec</p>	<p>Facilitators Lesley Laing Sydney School of Education and Social Work, the University of Sydney</p> <p>Dale Tolliday Clinical Advisor, New Street Services, NSW Health</p>	<p>Facilitators Anita Pell Associate, Berry Street Childhood Institute</p> <p>Marilyn McHugh Research Fellow, Social Policy Research Centre</p>

DEVELOPING A SHARED VIEW ON COMMISSIONING

On 15 March 2018 members of the Collective were invited to participate in a forum led by Family and Community Services (FACS) to discuss approaches to commissioning. The forum was facilitated by KPMG with Deidre Mulkerin, Deputy Secretary Commissioning and Michael Coutts-Trotter, Secretary, FACS also presenting.

This forum was an opportunity for the Collective to contribute to the discussion about the goals of commissioning and how these might, in the future, be better achieved.



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- Anglicare NSW South, NSW West and ACT
- Anglicare Sydney
- CareSouth
- Key Assets
- Life Without Barriers
- Mackillop Family Services
- Stretch-a-Family
- Settlement Services International (SSI)
- Australian Catholic University; Institute of Child Protection Studies