



Children in Care Collective



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New member of the Children in Care Collective

The Children in Care Collective is delighted to welcome a new member agency, Marist180.

The Collective anticipates that Marist180 will make a strong contribution to its work. Marist180 focuses on the needs of young people in New South Wales who require a broad range of structured therapeutic supports. Marist180 has been active in contributing to sector-led discussions, strongly advocating for the viability of NGOs and the needs of young people in care. The agency actively supports other providers in the sector to improve their capacity and capability through shared learnings and strong advocacy.

Marist180 will be represented at CCC meetings by CEO, Mr Peter Monaghan, or Mr Jonathan Raja, Director of Client Services.

Working with children with complex needs

As part of its focus on practice improvement, the CCC invited Bronwen Elliott, consultant and independent social worker, to lead a discussion at its October meeting. Ms Elliott's interests include sociological perspectives on child protection, and developments in our understanding of attachment and trauma. The discussion focused on working with children with complex needs in care, beginning by establishing who these children are.

It was agreed that these are notably vulnerable children, made up of a diverse group mostly older than twelve years but also including children of primary school age. Commonly these children have histories of complex trauma, both before and after removal from their families, who may be a risk to themselves (e.g. substance use, suicidal ideation) and/or other children (e.g. harmful sexual behaviours).

Multiple placement breakdown is common as well as high rates of suspension/expulsion from school: there are limited good placement options for them. Also difficult is accessing and coordinating mental health services for children with complex needs as they can be seen as too challenging for some services, service provision is fragmented and limited – particularly in regional areas – and private providers can be very expensive. It was noted that children are often diagnosed with ADHD instead of trauma and frequently they are prescribed medication before, or even instead of, trauma-focused interpersonal therapy.

In looking at what is currently working well, the discussion focused on wrap around models and placement settings where there is shared understanding of the child's trauma and care experiences, effective treatment and the capacity to manage risk. This relies on developing the right understanding of a child's trauma and child



protection history and its effect on their behaviour and development.

Newer models of care show promise, including:

- carers supporting other carers to promote skill development and a capacity to distinguish usual care issues from exceptional ones (e.g., the Mockingbird model) and
- therapeutic home-based care where carers have higher levels of training, time and resources, including the capacity to step down support while maintaining relationships.

The second half of the discussion focused on what constrains improvements in practice and what changes would be beneficial. Members agreed on several points.

It was noted that the transfer of case management for a child can inappropriately locate risk with a single agency. If there were ways to work through decision-making with the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), about placements and incidents, for example, risk could be better managed and innovative responses explored to enable the best possible care for a child with complex needs. Benefits were also identified in developing a model of shared responsibility with

DCJ, where a single conduit could enable both faster and broader exchange of information.

Another difficulty faced by agencies is getting timely financial approvals leading to delayed access to vital services or the agency having to cover costs and hope for reimbursement. Ideas canvassed included identifying costed options for services in addition to packages, thereby enabling quicker approval and faster service access.

There was considerable discussion about the multiple governance demands sometimes leading to duplication of extensive reporting. It is clear

that a focus on documentation and high level of scrutiny might be to the detriment of improved outcomes for the child, with skilled practitioners being required to undertake complex evidence gathering at the expense of working directly with vulnerable individuals. It was generally agreed that compliance with standards and demonstrated good practice would allow broader scope for innovation than compliance with prescriptive contracts.

The discussion was timely and valuable as the CCC reviews its policy priorities to ensure its work is tightly focused on achieving its vision of success.

Supporting academic research

Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) has been funded by the Department of Social Services to undertake research about the needs of young parents with an experience of the child protection and out-of-home care system in order to explore ways to prevent inter-generational contact.

ARACY contacted the CCC as part of its building of a network of agencies and people relevant to the research. Specifically, ARACY sought practitioners who would participate in an interview about the experience of young parents who are in care, or have spent time in care, and the support needs and programs that would assist these young parents, including those offered by the agency. Several CCC agencies volunteered to participate.

The research will be used to inform future policy and the revised National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children.

Associate Professor Tim Moore, Deputy Director (Practice Solutions) at the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia, presented to the August meeting of



the CCC. Tim is one of the critically important research contributors to the CCC.

Tim's presentation was on research entitled *Beyond safety: Ethical practice involving children* (the EPIC project) funded via an ARC Discovery grant.

The project aims to investigate the role of ethical practice in improving child safety.

A co-authored article '*Child safety in policy: Who is*

*being kept safe and from what?*¹ describes the findings of Phase I of the EPIC project, while Phase II interviews are underway notwithstanding the difficulties presented by COVID-19. Surveys are being developed for Phase III which will focus on the question of what practices most impact on a child/young person's sense of safety. CCC members will be invited to participate in this phase

of the research and look forward to the implications for practice.

¹ Powell MA, Graham A, Canosa A, Anderson D, Moore T, Robinson S, Thomas NP, Taylor N. *Child safety in policy: Who is being kept safe and from what?* Social Policy & Administration March 2020;1-19

An update on the operation of the National Redress Scheme – an advocate's perspective

Clare Leaney, CEO of the In Good Faith Foundation (IGFF) spoke to the CCC about her perspective as an advocate on the operation of the National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse and the need for better support for applicants.

Since 2014, IGFF has been a National Redress Support Service. IGFF offers free and confidential support to anyone considering applying to the National Redress Scheme. This includes helping people decide whether to apply, assistance with completing the application form and support throughout the process.

Ms Leaney was pleased to acknowledge that all CCC agencies have signed up to the National Redress Scheme – and said that it was very disappointing that some institutions have failed to do so, forcing some survivors into legal/civil mediation processes. She noted an encouraging cultural and societal shift to abuse being viewed as a mainstream rather than peripheral issue. The main elements of institutional abuse are physical abuse/neglect, sexual abuse, psychological, spiritual, cultural and sacramental/ritualistic and all need to be recognised. When asked about abuse in a faith based organisation, and whether the impact of the breach of trust was even more pro-



found, Ms Leaney agreed that abuse in this organisational context definitely adds complexity.

Talking about the successes of the National Redress Scheme, Ms Leaney focused on the much lower proof threshold, the prioritising of claims from survivors who are critically ill and the well-resourced support service as well as best practice in delivering apologies and personal responses (from some organisations).

Ms Leaney identified that difficulties with the scheme include the need for claimants to use technical language to describe abuse, which is often new and difficult for claimants. There are also significant delays in processing claims and

a lack of clarity about what constitutes the ‘extreme circumstances’ which would result in the claimant receiving the top financial redress payment. Of particular concern is that counselling is not available to claimants until the financial component is agreed despite the ongoing difficulties faced by many survivors (80% + of claimants have mental health and/or disability difficulties).

Ms Leaney noted that a younger demographic is coming forward, increasing the chances the offender is still active and the possibility of criminal or other processes. Discussion included a situation where one CCC agency had tried to notify other employers, including government, about a carer who had worked for several agencies and against whom a claim was being made. No other agency was interested in receiving this

information.²

Ms Leaney identified two priorities that need to be addressed in current inquiries about the operation of the National Redress Scheme:

- Making counselling available from the beginning of the application process
- Responding to younger claimants and those with additional care needs, with the scheme needing to develop a holistic understanding of how to respond well.

² It was subsequently confirmed with the Office of the Children’s Guardian that any new allegations received as part of the Redress Scheme against current carers or staff should be notified as usual. Whether an investigation would be required, or what that investigation entails, will be decided on a case by case basis in consultation with the OCG.

Submissions to inquiries and reports

Proposed increases in the cost of social work degrees

Following representations to individual government ministers, the CCC made a submission to the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee which reviewed the government’s draft legislation to increase student contributions to the cost of university degrees.

The CCC’s particular concern was the proposed 113 per cent increase in fees for social work degrees. The CCC’s submission emphasised that social work courses are highly vocationally oriented with structured work experience ensuring that graduates are immediately ready for work. It also referred to the increasing need for qualified social workers in many areas, including aged care, disability services, mental health and family violence services, and child protection – and the strong demand for graduates and especially

for graduates outside of the major cities.

The CCC argued that any changes to the cost of social work degrees should result in a reduction of the student contribution to studying for a profession in high demand. It noted that the proposed increased annual tuition fee for a social work degree bore no relationship to future earnings for social workers and was likely to turn people away from this critical profession, significantly impairing the capacity of the non-government sector to support the most vulnerable in our community, particularly in non-metropolitan areas.

The consultations on the Job-Ready Graduates legislation resulted in the Government announcing that it proposed creating ‘the disciplines of

Professional Pathway Psychology and Professional Pathway Social Work' and that social work studies would be moved to a lower tier of fees.

The Collective's submission can be accessed on its website linked [here](#)

NSW Department of Education draft Student Behaviour Policy

As reported in Bulletin 8, the CCC has been working on the issue of the access of all children to education and, in particular, reducing the high rate of suspensions and expulsions of children with complex needs in public schools.

In August, the NSW Department of Education (DoE) opened for consultation its draft Student Behaviour Strategy, due to launch in Term 1 2021.

The CCC submission on the draft Student Behaviour Policy supports the shift towards minimising the use of suspension and avoiding the cycle of exclusion and school disengagement. The cycle is all too common for children and young people with complex needs living in out-of-home care and possibly exacerbates issues that sit behind the behaviours that led to suspension being considered. The CCC also supports the reduced maximum period of suspensions for all years.

The CCC is pleased to see the introduction of additional considerations of student circumstances and notes the intention for schools to provide targeted support for vulnerable students. As schools provide important opportunities for social and emotional growth as well as educational opportunities, the CCC hopes the targeted support will not only reduce the rate of suspension of children and young people in care but will address all these ongoing needs.

The Collective supports the approach of build-



ing school capacity to meet the learning and wellbeing needs of students with complex, challenging and unsafe behaviours, including the establishment of a dedicated workforce comprising specialist staff, improved access to behaviour specialists in regional and remote locations, and new assessment tools. Improved interagency arrangements and the development of strong and constructive relationships between all those involved in the life of all children and young people in care, including agencies involved in decision-making, would be a very positive development.

The Collective's submission can be accessed on its website linked [here](#).

The CCC looks forward to more detail about the proposed model of complex behaviour support and has reaffirmed its willingness to continue

working with DoE on the proposed changes as they would affect children and young people with complex needs living in out-of-home care.

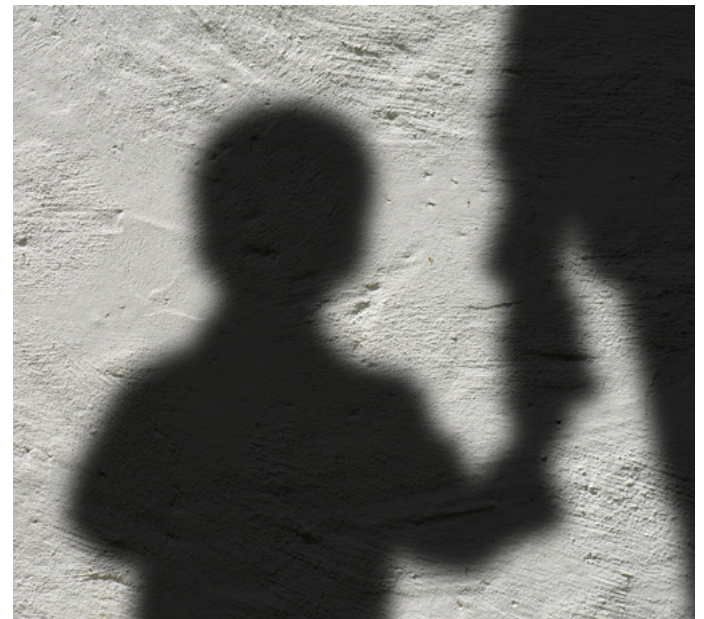
National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse

Two inquiries into the operation of the National Redress Scheme are underway: the Joint Select Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme to inform its second interim report and an independent review by Ms Robyn Kruk following two years of the operation of the Scheme. The independent review is considering the implementation and operation of the Scheme, survivor experience of the Scheme, access to support services and to counselling and psychological care as well as financial arrangements.

The CCC made submissions to both. Agencies who are members of the Collective are in various stages of engagement with the National Redress Scheme and some made individual submissions. The CCC submission drew on the experience of the Collective to address some of the broad difficulties arising from the current implementation of the National Redress Scheme.

The main points in the CCC submission were as follows:

- The need for significantly more practical training and detailed procedural guidance be provided to participating institutions on Requests for Information (RFIs).
- The work of institutions in responding to claims would be faster and simpler if the Scheme provided additional assistance to applicants in completing the application form, and if applications were reviewed/screened to ensure they are adequately completed be-



fore being provided to the participating institution with the RFI. An estimated date or date range for the alleged abuse would assist institutions in identifying all relevant information.

- The Collective noted that information received about alleged abuse through a RFI may give rise to the possibility of reportable allegations that have not previously been reported and investigated.
- Little guidance is provided about how institutions should manage claims when one survivor has made an allegation of abuse against an abuser but upon review of the institution's material, there may be other persons who may also have a right to make a redress claim. No guidance is provided on the extent of the obligation on the institution to inform

any former or subsequent employers of the alleged abuser or the agency responsible for managing reportable conduct allegations.

- The Collective recommends that the Scheme give further consideration to allowing a survivor to access counselling before the financial aspect of the claim is finalised. Noting the difficulties experienced by the majority of survivors of institutional abuse, the Col-

lective believes individuals may need support to be able to begin the process of claiming redress. This support would also be of assistance if the determination of claims is taking longer than anticipated.

The Collective's submission can be accessed on its website linked [here](#).

Updates to the CCC website

The CCC has started to develop a theory of change. The aim of this project is to enable us to think creatively about the purpose of the Collective, come to a new shared understanding of the complexity of the context in which members work and begin to map the pathways that can lead us towards the right outcomes.

As the first step in this process, the CCC has developed its Vision of Success –a picture of the future of out-of-home care in Australia that the CCC would like to see and will continue to work towards. Our vision, published on the website, is:

An effective and well-resourced service system supports children and young people with complex needs to grow up safely and well in out-of-home care, confident that their rights and wellbeing are protected and prioritised.

The goals of the CCC are clearly reflected in this vision. The next step is to review the CCC's policy priorities to ensure they support the achievement of this vision.



The CCC website has also been updated to reflect the increased advocacy work it is undertaking. The new tab **ADVOCACY** replaces the earlier **JOINT POSITIONS**. All submissions are listed, and hyperlinks are provided to the most recent.

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Members of the Collective

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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
- Australian Catholic University, Institute of Child Protection Studies

