



NSW Ombudsman's Annual Report 2009/10

Providing a summary of key points and concerns raised in the Ombudsman's Annual Report relating to child protection

Background

The Ombudsman's role in monitoring the child protection system previously focused primarily on Community Services as the lead agency. In line with the systemic changes under Keep Them Safe, the Ombudsman will be taking on broader responsibilities in the public and community sectors.

Discussion:

- The recommended changes of the Special Commission of Inquiry presumed adequate provision of an array of universal and targeted services, working together to ensure the provision of timely and appropriate support to children and their families. However, the introduction of new services is taking place differentially. For example, Family Referral Services are being trialled on a pilot basis in a limited number of locations and early intervention services are being expanded initially on a limited basis. Implementing the new system in this way means that there are potential risks in the ability of services to respond to concerns about children wherever they may be and to either directly provide or arrange for adequate support to vulnerable children across all areas of the state.
- There are questions regarding the ability of agencies to identify cumulative risk of harm to children and how effectively new information exchange provisions are being implemented. For example, the Ombudsman has concerns that the Child Wellbeing Units have only limited access to information on KIDS and the non-government sector will have no access at all.

OOHC

- The Ombudsman has had recurring concerns about inadequate assessments by Community Services of prospective carers for children in out-of-home care.

Concerns also arise in relation to probity checking of carers by NGOs because these organisations don't have access to information on KIDS. In a number of cases, these NGOs have authorised carers without being aware of critical information held by Community Services that raises questions about the person's appropriateness to provide care.

- The government's guidelines on supporting care leavers are not being consistently implemented. The administrative arrangements for approving and providing financial assistance for young people leaving care are cumbersome and protracted and as a result, young people often 'give up' on trying to obtain it.

Only one in five of the Community Services teams they interviewed said they provide after care support consistent with the government's leaving care guidelines.

- Issues identified in the review of how Community Services handled victims' compensation for young people in care.
- The report seems to presume that the transition of most out-of-home care to the NGO sector is proceeding and focuses on the need for Community Services to develop a detailed transition plan to ensure that the NGO sector has the capacity to undergo the massive expansion in services and workforce.

Complaint trends

There was a significant increase (33%) in formal complaints about OOHC services provided by Community Services and NGOs. However, the majority (90%) of these complaints concerned OOHC services provided by Community Services. The most frequently raised concerns about OOHC were the assessment, planning and provision of services that were relevant to the needs of the children and young people in care.

For child protection services, the concerns most frequently raised were about the quality of Community Services casework, case management and decision-making after reports about risks of significant harm.

Further information

Prepared by Toni Beauchamp, Principal Policy Officer
Contact person
Romola Hollywood, Manager Social Policy and Advocacy
Social Policy and Advocacy Team, Social Justice Unit
UnitingCare Children, Young People & Families
PO Box W244, Parramatta NSW 2150
Phone 02 9407 3215, Fax 02 9687 6349
Email: rhollywood@burnside.org.au