



Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Out-of-home care: Consultation Paper
Parkerville Children and Youth Care (Inc.) Response to the Royal Commission

Child Sexual Abuse by Carers and Staff

- Currently in WA there are gaps in the system for assessment and registration of Foster Carers vs employed carers. Employed carers are required to have a police clearance certificate, Working With Children Check (WWCC) and a screening through the Department for Child Protection and Family Support (CPFS). Although Foster Carers are required to have the same checks as employed carers, their recruitment process is in most cases extensive and includes review of their family of origin, relationships, significant life events etc. If approved their details are also entered on the CPFS Carers Register so if at any stage they are alleged as harming a child, any future screening will reveal the nature of the allegation. Records for employed carers are held with the employer organisation, and the recruitment process is not as intensive as a general Foster Carer assessment and is conducted in a formal interview process which does not always reveal the true motivation and any trauma history of potential employees. For employees a common register across organisations does not exist; where it may be alleged there are standard of care concerns the agency investigates, not CPFS, and their name will not be recorded in the database.

Child Sexual Exploitation

- Parkerville CYC do not consider sexual exploitation of children as mutually exclusive to child sexual abuse. Despite this, recognition should be given to the differences in the law related to these offences.
- The issue of online grooming is a particular area of concern. All children are vulnerable to this type of abuse but children placed in OHC are particularly vulnerable due to their trauma background and a strong desire to connect with others during puberty and adolescence. The increased placement changes that children in OHC experience leave them without long term relationships with trusted adults and peers which then leaves them vulnerable.

Child to Child Sexual Abuse

- The nature of residential care which requires multiple non-related children with various trauma and abuse backgrounds to live together is problematic. Far more time needs to be taken in regards to matching of children to the other children in the placement. Pressure from government child protection to place children usually overrides the ability to look at the abuse history and dynamics to ensure the risks can be minimised.
- More education for staff on what is appropriate sexual play or sexual behaviour depending on the age of the children is required. Protective Behaviours for staff and children should be mandatory to ensure that children become aware of what are safe and appropriate relationships and carers can reinforce by using the same language.
- Safety planning and the layout of residential settings can also act as a preventative measure to child on child sexual behaviour. Many of the residential units that are owned by child protection departments are not purpose built and are designed with the sleeping quarters of carers at the other end of the residence from children.
- Supervision cannot be overstated and although there has been a reduction in carer to child ratio in recent years, one adult providing care to 4-5 children who have various trauma and abuse histories is very difficult and this model of care ratio needs improvement.
- The number of placement changes for children in OHC disrupts the incidental learning that would normally occur over time between carer/ parent and child. This is particularly important with regards to learning about appropriate sexual behaviour and relationships.



Strengthen Regulation and Oversight Mechanisms

- Parkerville CYC would agree with this approach, however, there is inconsistency across jurisdictions and it would make sense to have a national approach to oversight. In WA, CPFS is looking to the Ombudsman as an independent party to provide oversight. Currently CPFS provide the oversight but as they are the funding body and a provider themselves, this can result in a conflict of interest. Although the Ombudsman has not commenced in this role, we are concerned that this is not the best fit. Child Safe Accreditation which is focused on the rigour required to provide children with a safe environment can be used Australia wide and would not be impacted by different State and Territory legislation. An approach like this would provide consistent standards in service delivery across Australia. It could also be a deterrent to child sexual abusers who move between states because of the gaps in obtaining records.

Improve Information Sharing

- Currently in WA, legislation related to the mandatory reporting for child sexual abuse prevents information in relation to the offence being shared. We have had to place children without any knowledge that they have been the subject of a mandatory report; this places the organisation, care staff and other children at significant risk. State and Commonwealth laws need to align in order for placement agencies to gain access to required information on children in their care (or being referred for care), to ensure that the best interests of all children can be met and we can safety plan appropriately.
- Parkerville CYC agree that there is a need for consistent arrangements in information sharing; and a need to determine the best practice model that is available and implemented Australia wide.

Child Safe Organisations

- Parkerville CYC are very supportive of this approach towards minimising the risks of all forms of child abuse.
- Parkerville Children CYC have engaged the Australian Childhood Foundation to go through the process and accredit us as a child safe organisation.
- Amongst other things this requires us to review all aspects of our HR process (including recruitment and training), suitably screening staff and volunteers and ensuring that all the information is available to the children in our programmes in a child friendly manner.
- Parkerville CYC is a leader in Australia in providing child focused responses to child sexual abuse. The Multiagency Investigation and Support Team (MIST) is a fully integrated response to child sexual abuse reports. The team operates from our purpose built Child Advocacy Centre in Armadale and includes a Child Abuse Squad from WA Police, CPFS and WA Police specialist child interviewers, CPFS district staff, two Child and Family Advocates from Parkerville CYC, a specialist Psychology team from Parkerville CYC and is overseen by Parkerville CYC's Director Therapeutic and Advocacy Services. The team provides an integrated service to children and their families from disclosure, through forensic interview, child protection assessment, police investigation, and therapeutic supports.
- In WA, there are extremely limited options for culturally appropriate counsellors and treatment programmes for indigenous children.
- Not only are these programmes limited in metropolitan areas, there are is significant lack of resources for children in remote Aboriginal communities.
- Increased data collection across Australia would provide evidence to demonstrate to Commonwealth and State Governments the extent of the problem and could stimulate funding to provide for increased training to staff, counsellors and foster carers.

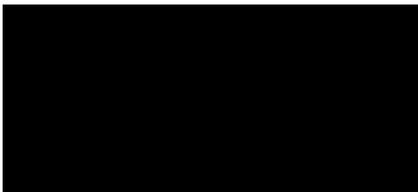


Better Approaches to preventing Child Sexual Abuse

- Parkerville CYC agrees that raising awareness of child sexual abuse is paramount. Parkerville CYC are leaders in this type of education and awareness in WA. Parkerville CYC has many programmes geared toward early intervention and prevention strategies which begin with community awareness and improving family functioning and resilience to better protect them from child abuse.
- Each year Parkerville host a charity lunch for over 900 people and the focus is always on educating the public about child abuse. A part of Parkerville CYC's marketing and communication strategy is to raise awareness within the community about the incidence and impacts of child abuse. We would support opportunities to develop this education programme further.
- We would also support the development of culturally and diversity sensitive resources.
- More knowledge and education is required for teachers and school communities on incidence and impacts of child abuse including the appropriate management of trauma related behaviours (including sexualised behaviours), so that children can attend school and not be excluded.

Improve Support for Children and Carers

- Parkerville CYC supports a professional model of care. This is a significant area of risk for Non-Government Organisations in regards to Industrial Relations issues and tax laws which do not adequately allow compensation of carers for their time in a voluntary capacity. The ATO are aware of the issue and there is high level of advocacy across all states to the Federal government but no changes have been made. The Autism Association in WA has been able to secure a private ruling that recognises the unique needs of this group of children requiring consistent carers over longer periods of time to achieve improved outcomes. There are similarities in the type of care arrangement for children in OHC who require consistent carers in order to provide a therapeutic model of care. A professionalised model of foster care would be supported by Parkerville CYC.
- Parkerville CYC also support nationally recognised training for foster carers, professional carers and any other direct care staff. There are national standards in aged care and disabilities, etc., but none for the OHC sector. Children in OHC are a unique and specialised group that require staff be adequately trained to provide an appropriate level of care.
- We would also support a nationally recognised therapeutic framework for service delivery to ensure that there are consistent standards across Australia. Children should not be penalised because they happen to be placed in care in a different state or even a different geographical location within the same state.



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