

22 April 2016

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse  
GPO Box 5283  
Sydney  
NSW 2001

**RE: Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Out-of-Home Care**

Anglicare NT welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback into the Royal Commission's work on improving institutional responses to child sexual abuse in out-of-home care.

We note that Anglicare Australia has provided a response to the Royal Commission's consultation paper on behalf of the Anglicare network. Anglicare NT's submission should be read as an extension of the Anglicare network's comments.

This submission is informed by the experience of Anglicare NT as a service provider.

**About Anglicare NT**

Operating since the 1940s, Anglicare NT is a significant multidisciplinary provider of quality direct client services and community capacity building programs across urban, rural, regional, and remote areas of the Northern Territory. Over 80 services are delivered from key operational centres and program hubs in Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine, Alice Springs, Nhulunbuy, Groote Eylandt, Numbulwar, Milingimbi and Ngukurr.

Anglicare NT has evolved in the Northern Territory from locally formed organisations and has demonstrated and maintains a long term commitment to the Territory. Anglicare NT understands the complexity of service delivery in culturally diverse communities, is familiar with operating in geographically and culturally challenging environments, and has an accumulative knowledge base from which to manage complex operations. Around 50% of our staffing base works outside of the Darwin region; localised knowledge and networks effectively combine with experienced Operational and Executive Managers to maintain a substantial NT wide and regional organisational knowledge base.

Employing approximately 320 staff and over 200 active volunteers, Anglicare NT is an organisation with stable governance, strong management and committed staff well positioned to deliver high quality services and projects and to expand operations. Anglicare NT delivers a suite of interconnected client and community services throughout the Northern Territory currently including:

- Out of Home Care and Leaving Care
- Youth and Youth Health Services
- Financial Literacy, Microfinance and Financial Counselling Services
- Counselling and Relationship Services
- Housing Support and Transition Service Family Support Services
- Youth Mental Health and Suicide Intervention Skills Training
- Support for Refugees and Migrants
- Early Childhood Services
- Family support and parenting services
- Services for Aged and People with a Disability
- Community Capacity Building projects and initiatives.

## **Background**

Out-of-home care services in the NT are predominantly managed by the Department of Children and Families (DCF). While some residential care services are outsourced to NGOs such as Anglicare NT, case management responsibilities remain with DCF. Due to growing demand for foster care, DCF is increasingly allocating foster care placements to private providers through a family day care model, avoiding rigorous screening process for foster carers but resulting in very high costs of 'educator' payments.

The vast majority of children in out-of-home care are Aboriginal. Most of these children are removed from culture, family and region to be placed in care. The levels of intergenerational trauma and vulnerability are significant and require care that is trauma informed and culturally adapted.

The child protection system in NT is under duress, as it is in the rest of the country. It would appear to be particularly brittle in NT due to high levels of poverty, notification, cultural issues and geographical remoteness.

A particular concern for service quality in out-of-home care in the NT is the lack of jurisdictional standards and registration requirements for providers; both government and non-government. Agencies are asked to comply with the national out-of-home care standards but these are not designed to be used at the service level. Anglicare NT would like to see the NT develop quality accreditation processes with the same rigour and depth of those used in NSW and Victoria.

A second concern is the role of a government department as the primary provider of out-of-home care. In the NT, over worked child protection workers are expected to perform complex forensic work across culture and distance, as well as provide case management for children in care, support foster and kinship carers, and plan for family reunification or leaving care. Consequently, these functions frequently fall between the cracks of high turnover and high demand. Only 20% of eligible young people in care have a leaving care plan and the same percentage of children in care have a completed case plan. We are of the view that the NT should follow other jurisdictions (and the evidence of the Carmody Report and other inquiries) and make more use of the NGO sector as providers of out-of-home care.

## **Response to the Royal Commission's consultation paper on institutional responses to child sexual abuse in out-of-home care**

### *Child sexual exploitation*

Anglicare NT supports the need for a national reporting framework for consistency to show incidence and prevalence.

A key issue for us is minimizing the risk of young people who run away from the residential unit, particularly vulnerable young Aboriginal women. With an overworked child protection system providing case management, staff in residential facilities are extremely limited in their ability to respond to young people who abscond and return to family or community. It is critical that therapeutic services are able to provide 24/7 care, assertive follow up, case management away from the facility, and family support.

With high staff turnover and a disjointed service system, it is often difficult for young people to know or trust key people to whom they should report sexual abuse allegations. Anglicare NT believes that this would be assisted by the transfer of case management responsibilities to the NGO sector, given the sector's expertise in relationship-based work. We are also supportive of the establishment of an official visitor's scheme in the Territory.

### *Child to child sexual abuse*

There is currently a severe shortage of residential care options in the NT. As a result, there is pressure to place young people with a history as abusers in congregate settings alongside other vulnerable young people. This is largely a result of the lack of other placement options for these young people. Anglicare NT is supportive of the use of professional foster care placements, particularly

where carers are trained and supported to respond to children who have displayed sexually harmful behaviour, and we believe that one-on-one placements are critical in the NT.

It is Anglicare NT's view that improving the quality of data on child sexual abuse in OOHC is a priority for service improvement. As an OOHC provider, we report this information to DCF and we would support the development of a scheme to ensure that unidentifiable information is available to be shared for incidence and prevalence reporting.

### *Regulation and oversight*

Anglicare NT is supportive of the development of an independent system of accreditation. We are encouraged by the NSW model of the Children's Guardian, and we support the development of official visitor schemes.

In principle, we support the development of a carer's register, including OOHC staff. Any register would need to be developed in collaboration with the sector to ensure that the administration burden is acceptable, and that issues of privacy and fairness are adequately explored.

### *Information sharing*

We support the recommendation for all jurisdictions to have in place nationally consistent arrangements for intra-jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional exchange of information related to the safety and well being of children, including information relating to child sexual abuse in OOHC context. We are supportive of the model contained within Chapter 16A the Children and Young Persons (Care and protection) Act 1998 (NSW).

### *Child Safe organisations*

Anglicare NT supports the nine key elements of child safe organisations as outlined in the Royal Commission's discussion paper.

We support a national working with children scheme as opposed to different requirements for different jurisdictions.

### *Prevention of Child Sexual Assault in OOHC*

We support the Royal Commission's proposed national education strategy to prevent child sexual abuse in OOHC.

### *Supportive and Quality Care Environment*

Anglicare NT supports the strategies proposed regarding: therapeutic / trauma informed framework; placement stability; workforce planning; and, increased support for leaving care.

## **Conclusion**

Out-of-home care services in the NT are in urgent need of improvement. There is good will and effort occurring within DCF and the NGO sector, however, the service system is immature and under enormous pressure. This leaves young people vulnerable to further harm. Anglicare NT welcomes the overall direction of the system improvements recommended by the Royal Commission.

Yours sincerely,



Dave Pugh  
Chief Executive Officer  
**Anglicare NT**