



SECTOR RESPONSE TO THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS REFORM

CHILD AND FAMILY WELFARE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

POSITION PAPER, OCTOBER 2016

The aim of this paper is to articulate the non-government sector's position on the priorities for reform of the child protection sector in South Australia. The Child and Family Welfare Association of South Australia (CAFWA-SA) intends to utilise this paper to underpin its advocacy to government on the changes required to give effect to a robust and responsive child protection sector in this state.

PREAMBLE

CAFWA-SA is supportive overall of the need for child protection sector reform, and is pleased to see the level of commitment demonstrated to date by the Minister for Education and Child Development, the Minister for Child Protection Reform and the Premier. There is an obvious drive coming from within government to implement the kinds of changes that are necessary to keep children safe in this state.

Work to date has focused on administrative and legislative amendments that in and of themselves will not result in system reform; they will incrementally alter the means by which the existing system functions and will unlikely result in changed outcomes for vulnerable children and their families, nor stem the flow of children and young people into the care system.

CAFWA-SA has called upon the government to consider longer term processes of implementation in order to take stock of what a radically redesigned child protection system could look like, and what outcomes are being sought for children, their families and the persons that support them.

This position paper calls urgently for the process of system reform in South Australia to be consultative, collaborative, and inclusive of the voices of children, carers, Aboriginal families and communities and the non-government sector.

BACKGROUND

The Child and Family Welfare Association of South Australia (hereafter CAFWA-SA) is the peak representative body for non-government agencies providing out-of-home care and residential placements for children and young people under Guardianship in South Australia.

CAFWA-SA also represents those agencies providing early intervention and preventative family services and support to families deemed at risk of further contact with the South Australian child protection system. CAFWA-SA and its members currently work in collaboration with Families SA and the Office for Child Protection in order to identify opportunities to divert children and their families from formal child protection interventions.

With the release of Commissioner Nyland's findings and report into the South Australian child protection system in early August 2016, the Child and Family Welfare Association of South Australia (CAFWA-SA), along with other sector peaks, was compelled to develop this position paper on the resulting sector reforms and implementation of the Commissioner's recommendations.

With the government's announcement of the particular recommendations that are currently being considered for implementation, CAFWA-SA and its members are concerned that a deeper level of consultation and engagement with the sector is required in order to develop a shared vision of a robust and functional child protection system for South Australia. CAFWA-SA is particularly interested in seeing the public health model as articulated in the National Framework for Child Protection reflected in the implementation of reform measures in this state, and a heightened focus on prevention and early intervention measures.

This paper has been developed in close consultation with CAFWA-SA Board members, agency CEO's and members in order to articulate a consolidated response to sector reform measures, and the critical areas for further attention by government.

Key priority areas have been described as follows –

- 1. An alternative vision of the South Australian child protection system**
- 2. Equal partnerships**
- 3. Sector collaboration and innovation**
- 4. Measurement of outcomes and use of evidence**
- 5. Primary health models of prevention and early intervention**
- 6. Training, development and sector support**
- 7. Deeper engagement and consultation with the non-government sector**

PRIORITY AREAS

1. *An alternative vision of the South Australian child protection system*

The notion of an 'alternative vision' of the child protection system as compared to what currently exists in South Australia has been a resonant theme within the non-government sector. The requirement of a continued separation of responsibilities between the state and the non-government sector has been broadly deemed as necessary, however the extent to which government needs to refine and focus on its statutory responsibilities, rather than attempting to duplicate work in prevention and early intervention, which is the domain of the non-government sector and community organizations has been reiterated. Greater sharing of responsibility between government and the non-government sector in the areas of family preservation and reunification of children with their families has been consistently emphasized.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS –

- **Outsource a greater share of prevention and early intervention activities to the non-government sector;**
- **Revert to a regionalized / localized approach to the coordination of statutory child protection responses that includes consultation and collaboration with non-government providers;**
- **Articulate and agree on shared roles and responsibilities across various government agencies including health, education and housing for identifying and responding to families who would benefit from prevention or early intervention services;**
- **Consult deeply with the sector on the role and remit of the new Department for Child Protection;**
- **Establish an inter-governmental working group led by the Minister for Child Protection to address as a matter of priority the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system;**
- **Establish a Ministerial Advisory Board on Child Protection and Child Rights; and**
- **Agree on a set of outcomes that guide all child protection interventions, such as those outcomes contained in the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Young People**

2. *Equal partnerships*

There has been a consistent sense of the need for a more clearly defined relationship between government, the non-government sector and the community, whereby the sector and the community are treated as equal partners in the ongoing project of developing and providing safe and nurturing environments for children and young people. This relationship should encourage frank and robust discussions and viewpoints which, if articulated in partnership and contractual arrangements, will have the benefit of avoiding any potential fears of repercussions. An environment must be created whereby non-government organizations and the community can provide open and honest feedback about elements of the system that may not provide optimal outcomes for children and families, as well as practice and policy barriers to the achievement of good outcomes. The sector and the community can then, in turn, actively work with government to generate solutions. Such partnerships with government equalize the sector and community. In addition, the sector is keen to be engaged in all stages of consultation, including the planning and scoping, providing opportunities for meaningful input, review of the findings and decision making about future directions.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS –

- Utilize the ‘Stronger Together’ Framework for guiding meaningful, ongoing engagement with the non-government sector on prioritizing recommendations from the Royal Commission’s Report for implementation;
- Continue the commitment to high level meetings between Department for Child Protection (DCP) Executive and CAFWA-SA Executives; and
- Strengthen the operation of the current Placement Coordination Panel (PCP) such that meetings result in timely and tangible placement outcomes for children in emergency and residential care

3. Sector collaboration and innovation

There is an overwhelming level of shared goodwill between non-government organizations, a commitment to work collaboratively as organisations and peak bodies, and a sense that greater collaboration and innovation could be more proactively facilitated by government. It has been suggested that the fear of repercussions on contracts and the resource implications of these may work to inhibit non-government organizations from providing feedback and advice to government that may be deemed as undesirable. Organizations believe that they must be encouraged, supported and provided with the incentive to collaborate, innovate, share and challenge the status-quo. This could best be given effect by examining the current funding environment in which organizations must actively compete and pit themselves against one another for funding and resources. The sector would instead like to see funding arrangements that reward collaboration and partnership with multiple actors and agencies, and which allow for a sharing of resources and concomitant responsibilities for outcomes. This approach also requires sufficient time to support it prior to new expressions of interest being put forward.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS –

- Establish a preferred provider panel for non-government providers in the domains of prevention and early intervention, foster carer recruitment and assessment, out-of-home care support, residential care and peak sector advocacy;
- Ensure that unit-costing measures are utilized to project the true cost of high quality and outcomes based service provision;
- Promotion and facilitation of Collective Social Impact Approaches that are focused in designated regional hubs (As per Recommendation 51)
- The recommended local area child and family assessment and referral networks with a lead non-profit agency be established to provide the backbone support for the Collective Impact approaches but with a separation from the role of service delivery.
- Encourage via contractual arrangements a partnership approach to service and program design that incentivises agencies to work collaboratively in the design and development of new programs and services; and
- Allow more flexible contract arrangements that enable service providers to utilize unspent funds on the development and implementation of service responses that are innovative and which address client need

4. Measurement of outcomes and use of evidence

The use of shared measures of service and program success in order to quantify outcomes for children and families has been a recurrent topic for discussion. Whilst there is broad based

agreement that the implementation of results based accountability (RBA) as a reporting framework is a positive step towards the illustration of successful outcomes for service users, the sector is calling for a greater emphasis on the independent evaluation of services and programs that is undertaken in partnership between service providers, service users, funding bodies and universities.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS –

- **Embed RBA reporting across all contracts currently administered for the delivery of child protection and related services;**
- **In consultation with the non-government sector, establish an online data management system that enables the capture, collation and analysis and transparent regular reporting by multiple government and duly-endorsed community partner agencies.**
- **Involve the non-government sector in the establishment of an Evidence and Reporting Directorate and subsequent reporting mechanisms to ensure timely and efficient collection of data from service providers; and**
- **Include funding in service contracts for the implementation of independent evaluation of new services and programs**

5. Primary health models of prevention and early intervention

Stemming the flow of children and young people in to the child protection system must be considered as one of the most fundamental and critical elements of child protection system reform. A wholesale redesign of prevention and early intervention initiatives will be required in order to tackle the systemic issues that lead to family incapacity to provide safe and secure environments for children. Whilst Commissioner Nyland highlights the importance of prevention and early intervention throughout her report, the recommendations relating specifically to measures for adequately resourcing initiatives that will have a sustained impact are few. CAFWA-SA and its member agencies are of the view that a functional child protection system needs to be designed from the ground up, and needs to focus on the ways in which communities and non-government organizations can pro-actively support families before crisis occurs; strengthening family capacity and capability to care for their children is an absolute priority and requires a radical shift in emphasis and resourcing away from crisis intervention towards community conscientization and the mobilization of community assets which can be leveraged to safeguard children in their own homes. In this respect, what is required goes well beyond the reform of the child protection system, it is the need for the creation of a whole of government/whole of community response to enhance the wellbeing of all children and families in SA.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS –

- **Design a proportional funding model that allocates a greater percentage of overall funding and resources to initiatives designed primarily around prevention and early intervention;**
- **Adopt a whole-of-government framework to the provision of service and support to families at higher risk which includes consistent outcome measures across health, education, housing and child protection;**
- **Development of a Child-Friendly approach that places children at the centre of the State's economic development plan and addresses questions such as:**
 - **What is it like to be a child in SA today?**
 - **How can we do to make SA a better state to grow up in?**

- **If Adelaide wants to sustain its high ranking amongst the worlds ‘most liveable cities’ can we improve, and market, the correlation between thriving, functional families and communities and a vibrant economy?, and**
- **Reinvigorate the state government’s commitment to the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Young People with particular emphasis on prevention and early intervention**

6. Sector training, development and support

The requirement for a highly skilled workforce that functions across the domains of prevention, early intervention and family support, crisis care, family preservation and reunification cannot be understated. The child protection workforce does not currently enjoy access to sustained and consistent training, development and support which is required to maintain high levels of quality in service provision. Human services work is difficult work and those engaged in environments where emotional labour is required must be able to access the kinds of professional development and support that sustains them in their work and which assists them to provide quality services to children and families. CAFWA-SA is of the view that such sector development could well be provided in partnership with one or a number of registered training organizations, with CAFWA-SA acting as the coordinating body. The notion of CAFWA-SA playing this role in South Australia is reflected in recommendation 125 of Commissioner Nyland’s report, and it is entirely possible that more coordinated training, development and sector support could be provided were resources made available to scope the level of training and support required across the different service domains, and then to match consistent training programs to meet them. CAFWA-SA is exploring partnerships with ACWA in NSW and the Victorian Centre for Excellence in Child Protection in order to begin piecing together a robust and accessible service offering for the sector that results in a more highly skilled and supported workforce.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS –

- **Institute a formal training college within the new Department for Child Protection that mirrors former work conducted by the DFC College for Learning and Development, and with a particular focus on training and up-skilling social workers, case managers, clinical practitioners and family support workers;**
- **Pursue formal partnerships with a tertiary institution for the delivery of higher level training and education to child protection practitioners;**
- **Provide funding and resources to CAFWA-SA to implement cross sector training and education programs in partnership with a recognised RTO; and**
- **Commission CAFWA-SA to design and develop a consistent training schedule and calendar of professional development events accessible by all staff working in the non-government child protection sector**

7. Deeper engagement and consultation with the sector

CAFWA-SA and its members are concerned at the speed with which recommendations have been picked up by government for implementation and the marked lack of deep, meaningful engagement and consultation that has taken place with the sector around where the priorities ought to be. There is a sense that consultative forums to date have not resulted in the kinds of discussions that are necessary to redesign child protection at the systemic level and to shift the onus of responsibility from one government department to the entire community and to a much wider range of government departments and agencies. Discussions around the particular role that local government

could play in a reformed system have not taken place, nor has there been an opportunity to engage in truly transformative thinking about funding and contracting arrangements, service and program redesign, and the ways in which Aboriginal families and communities need to be consulted and engaged throughout the reform process.

Recent discussions with CAFWA-SA, CREATE, SACOSS, Chair of the Council for the Care of Children, AFSS and prominent academics held by Boston Consulting Group do represent an effort to explore what the broader systemic change could look like, however there is concern that two, three hour meetings is not a sufficient level of engagement for such far reaching work. Nor does it appear that there will be future opportunity to work with government on what will finally be agreed as the way forward.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS –

- **Release the government’s community engagement strategy in relation to the implementation process for Commissioner Nyland’s report to the community and non-government agencies to provide transparency and certainty.**
- **Commit to a series of sector consultations in late 2016 / early 2017 with the non-government sector to explore alternative funding models for integrated service delivery for at-risk families;**
- **Commit to targeted consultation with Aboriginal agencies and community organizations in order to agree on culturally appropriate and effective measures to better support Aboriginal parenting practices;**
- **Continue to support the Family Matters Campaign in South Australia in order to enable Aboriginal community organizations to provide feedback on the process of child protection system reform;**
- **Commission the CREATE Foundation (SA) to consult deeply with children and young people in care on the measures require to ensure best possible placement outcomes;**
- **Engage with foster carers and the agencies that support them to discover means to better support and retain active foster carers in the out-of-home care system;**
- **Consult with local government to determine what role they could play in coordinating regionalized responses to families requiring support;**
- **Provide enhanced funding and support to Together SA to operationalize learnings taken from the Together in the North and Together in the South initiatives; and**
- **Provide the necessary resources and funding to CAFWA-SA to coordinate sector input into service and program re-design that better targets families in need of prevention or early intervention services**

Comments and feedback are welcome to Rob Martin, Executive Director, Child and Family Welfare Association of South Australia

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