



CAFFSA ELECTION POLICY POSITION
Address the Critical Shortage of Qualified and Skilled Child
Protection and Child Safety Staff.
January 2022

Across South Australia, CAFFSA notes that there is a critical shortage of a qualified, skilled and available workforce to respond to the need of the increasing number of children and young people coming into statutory care.

The need to address the skills shortage and workforce development gaps for child protection and child safety staff in South Australia is now urgent.

CAFFSA takes the position that the Government of South Australia should commit to;

- ***Funding the development and implementation of a South Australian NGO family support industry blueprint and workforce development strategy***
- ***Subsidising the cost of training for the Certificate IV in Child Youth and Family Intervention and the Certificate IV in Disability for front-line child protection staff in the non-government sector in SA;***
- ***Bringing South Australian training requirements for front-line child protection staff in line with National standards and trends;***
- ***Recognition of equivalent qualifications, including that a first year of a recognised university degree being deemed the equivalent to a Certificate IV; and***
- ***Providing dedicated funding to bridge the gap of required knowledge and skills essential to working with children and families who are coming into contact with the child protection system and what students are currently trained in through tertiary education institutions.***

Background

The Child, Youth and Family (CYF) service system in South Australia has faced a growing number of challenges over the past decade. Child protection notifications and the number of children entering Out-Of-Home Care (OoHC) have steadily increased; at-risk children, young people and families are presenting with increasingly complex issues, for which much of the CYF workforce is unprepared; the risk threshold for statutory child protection involvement is increasing, with child and family services consequently working with higher-risk families without the appropriate skills and resources; and

overwhelming demand on the service system prohibits at-risk families from accessing early intervention opportunities and support when most needed. External factors such as population growth and the subsequent increase in CALD and Aboriginal populations, lack of housing affordability, and an increase in the prevalence of family violence and mental health issues place additional demands on an already-struggling service system.

The South Australian government is subsequently embarked upon a range of significant reforms in the CYF sector, with an emphasis on workforce planning and growth, early intervention and prevention, culturally-valid service delivery, and cross-sector service design. The South Australian child protection system itself is also experiencing significant reform, as an outcome of the Child Protection Systems Royal Commission and its 2016 report into the child protection system in South Australia.

The Life They Deserve report highlighted significant deficits within the broad child protection workforce in South Australia; a workforce characterised by inadequate training and qualifications, high staff turnover, and insufficient industry planning. The report subsequently recommended the creation of a new Department of Child Protection (DCP), who would be tasked with leading workforce planning and development across the CYF sector. DCP were to work with key stakeholders to “develop and implement a workforce strategy designed to improve staffing practices and performances across the broader child protection system” (NRC 30); and CAFFSA was consequently funded to work in partnership with DCP to develop an NGO workforce development strategy that would complement internal DCP workforce planning.

An industry blueprint and a sector workforce development strategy that addresses key challenges faced by the workforce and helps to improve agency staffing practices and performance is urgently required. In consultation with the NGO family support, early intervention and child protection sector, and in collaboration with DHS, DCP, and non-government sector stakeholders and service providers, the strategy should focus on agencies working in early intervention and prevention, family support and reunification, and OOHC, and fund the sector to equip it with the skills, expertise and knowledge required to improve the outcomes of children, young people and families in South Australia.

The funded strategy would also incorporate opportunities for greater cross-sectoral collaboration and consistency, to provide an end-to-end service for at-risk children, youth and their families, and ensure their needs and ‘voice’ are at the heart of workplace planning. Its strategic directions would align with planning in mental health, Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD), and other sectors relevant to the CYF field.

In addition to delivering NRC 30, the strategy will address a number of Nyland recommendations regarding workforce planning, training and development, including:

- NRC 191: Provide all practitioners in the child protection system with training, support and clinical supervision to give them the knowledge, skills and techniques to work effectively with Aboriginal children and families, including, where appropriate, the specific skills required to work effectively in remote Aboriginal communities;

- NRC 227: Train agency caseworkers to recognise and respond to the needs of children with disabilities, particularly in accessing and maximising support services offered by NDIS; and
- NRC 201: Actively pursue joint training opportunities for agencies in remote communities and require operational managers from agencies to meet regularly to identify areas for collaboration and to resolve issues of concern.