

Summary Report 3: Final Version.

Joint advocacy for positive reforms
Getting together to focus on solutions
Listening to everyone in the sector

Child and Family Focus SA Forum
"Improving Family Wellbeing and Child Protection:
What are our priorities for the next four years in SA?"

Purpose of this summary report.

On 6 May 2022, 68 participants from 28 organisations attended a forum to discuss priorities for action to improve family wellbeing and child protection in South Australia.

After the Forum, Summary Report 1 was circulated to all attendees and CAFFSA Members. It provides an overview of key issues discussed at the Forum and a range of the comments received in the evaluation sheets completed on the day.

Summary Report 2 provides more information about the key issues raised by First Nations' speakers and participants on the day and the response of participants generally.

This Summary Report 3 provides more information about the key issues raised by speakers and participants about a deep desire to join together as a sector to advocate for positive reforms to improve the safety for children and young people. Speakers and participants said they want more opportunities to get together to focus on solutions, not problems. They want to hear what fellow service providers are doing to make a positive difference in the lives of children, young people and families – and what they are doing to recruit, train, retain and support their professional and volunteer workforces.

A striking feature of the CAFFSA Forum in May 2022 was a keen interest among participants in listening to each other and all parties in the sector. In their evaluation sheets and comments on the day, participants applauded the opportunity to hear in depth from a wide range of people in the sector. These included young people with experience of being in care, First Nations people, advocates for young people, including the CREATE Foundation, advocates for foster and kinship carers, including Fiona Endacott, CEO Connecting Foster & Kinship Carers SA, who presented via video, and fellow service providers.

Here is the video presentation by Fiona Endacott CEO, Connecting Foster and Kinship Carers SA, filmed for the forum: <https://youtu.be/01fwUZq2t3E>
Duration: 8.45 minutes.

While participants said they valued the panel discussion format, their feedback was that in future they want more time for audience questions and comments and small group discussion. Several speakers and participants also expressed regret that representatives from the Department of Child Protection were not involved in the forum. Others regretted that foster and kinship carers did not have a greater voice in the discussions.

Overview

The following is an extract from the first report, summarising issues from the Forum, relating to the following topics.

Joint advocacy for positive reforms

Members are seeking an assertive, unified and evidence-based approach to advocacy from the sector to improve the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

Participants are asking for more opportunities to come together to share experience and develop consensus-based, joint positions on key issues to take to government and to implement in service provision.

"Use our sector strength to influence change in the protection and care of children and young people. We need to work together. Be one voice." Forum Participant.

"I want to see really brave advocacy prioritised. We have to be loud and adamant about the change that we want to see." Forum Participant.

"Advocacy - focus on contributing factors. There are increasing numbers of families living below the poverty line. The association of financial stress and DV was in the media this week. Housing affordability is a huge concern. The housing crisis is going to push more families into stress and crisis, which will ultimately impact on children and young people entering care. We need a universal income that allows people to live with dignity. We need a strong Medicare system that is all inclusive e.g. dental and mental health. To stop the cycle we need to invest in social policies and remove the poverty gap, and give equal opportunity for everyone to thrive." Forum Participant

"I was keen to point out what I see as an inherent issue with advocacy in our sector which is a fear. Firstly we are trained to be modest and believe we are not experts. Secondly, we have seen so many things not work over the years, we are scared to put our name to something because we are not certain that it will work. And thirdly, we

"are still scared to bite the hand that feeds us, so we resist being critical of the Department and/or Ministers." Forum Participant

"Review of the Child Safety Act. This will be an opportunity for CAFFSA and its members to examine policies, processes and approaches and advocate for more comprehensive improvements." Forum Participant

"Lobby/advocate for social determinates to be addressed. Child and family wellbeing are directly affected by a range of social determinants and level of poverty. Poverty is a key driver of children being unsafe and neglected. Need to lobby for: Increased rate of social security payments (all of which are below poverty line); Increased public housing, housing affordability, secure and affordable rentals. Draw on data with evidence of improved wellbeing due to COVID supplement (i.e. increased social security payments, which enabled families to pay bills, buy more nutritious food and provide for children's needs)." Forum Participant

Opportunities to get together to focus on solutions

"Support CAFFSA to hold these kinds of forums three or four times a year to provide continuous updates on achieving the key priorities and actions." Forum Participant.

"Continuous catch-ups and engagement with appropriate organisations." Conference Speaker.

Taking evidence-based solutions to government

The video presentations recorded for the forum, by the leaders of the Queensland and Victorian peak agencies, Lindsay Wegener, Executive Director, PeakCare Inc and Deb Tsorbaris, CEO, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare respectively, placed great emphasis on the importance of taking solutions, not problems, to government.

Each emphasised that the key to effective advocacy to improve policies and funding for the child protection sector was evidence-based recommendations for reform. Taking responsibility for finding and implementing effective solutions to entrenched problems was seen as the key to attracting the attention, respect and support of Ministers, Treasury officials and departmental staff.

Interviews with Deb Tsorbaris, CEO, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare Victoria were filmed in three parts for the Forum. Each part covers different topics, as listed below.

Deb Tsorbaris, CEO, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare Victoria.

Workforce, Keeping Children Safe in Care, Voice for Youth:

<https://youtu.be/hblwbGusmow>

Duration: 12 minutes.

Deb Tsorbaris, CEO, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare Victoria.

Transition, Raising Age To 21, First Nations: <https://youtu.be/NUScRqe7OTU>

Duration: 8 minutes.

Deb Tsorbaris, CEO, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare Victoria.

Positive Partnership with Government, Information Sharing Scheme, Listening to

Children: <https://youtu.be/us8WqNETnyQ>

Duration: 12 minutes.

The interview with Queensland Executive Director of PeakCare Inc; Lindsay Wegener, can be found here: https://youtu.be/R7m6CTIND_w

Duration: 17 minutes.

Value of hearing all the voices:

Children and young people; siblings; family; foster carers.

Participants emphasised the value of hearing the views of young people who had been in care. The key message from the young people was a profound yearning for stability. They spoke eloquently of the need for stability with their foster or other carers, support workers, schools and community connections. They want support workers to telephone and visit regularly, listen and develop relationships based on trust and support. They want their concerns to be heard and investigated. They want to feel safe.

The issue of achieving sexual safety, while in care and after leaving care, was also raised by young adults who had grown up in care. Concerns were raised about the high rate of sexual assault experienced by young people who had been in care and the challenges of avoiding assault after leaving care.

A key message was the desire to maintain connection with their siblings and, if they are not able to live together, then they need regular, reliable contact.

Several young adults, who had been in care for much of their lives, participated actively in the in-depth discussions at the forum. There was a keen interest in hearing how children and young people can participate and contribute to decision-making and improving services, both while they are in care, and also after they have left care. Representatives of the CREATE Foundation shared examples of the work they do to support young people as advocates for positive change.

In the Evaluation Sheets, many participants listed hearing the views of young people as among the most useful parts of the day. Here are some examples:

"Hearing the voice of the young person. William and Felicity were so very powerful."
Forum Participant

"Hearing the voices of young people with experience of the system." Forum Participant

"Hearing from the young people's experiences." Forum Participant

"Hearing from the young people directly." Forum Participant

"The perspectives of the young people with lived experience." Forum Participant

"Hearing from young people who were in care and their perspectives which should be placed at the centre of all our efforts in this space." Forum Participant

The value of hearing the voices of all key people with lived experience in contact with the child protection system was also raised. The importance of hearing the voices of parents, siblings, extended family members and foster carers was emphasised. Family Group Conferencing, as well as other strategies and systems for ensuring wide participation in decision making were discussed. This was widely acknowledged as key to ensuring the best possible results for the children and young people in need.

"Parents' role in supporting young people in care. This is important for young people's stability. For parents to address concerns and have a positive relationship."
Forum Participant.

"Increased lived-experience voice, including children and young people, families, carers etc. New approaches to early intervention / prevention / foster care / kinship care / residential care. Models need to be co-designed with lived experience voice, especially regarding First Nations peoples." Forum Participant.

CREATE Foundation's advocacy: voice, siblings, and integrated support

The contribution of representatives from the CREATE Foundation was warmly received. It was notable that CREATE provides opportunities for children and young people in care to gather together at safe community events with their siblings and that family members, foster parents and other friends are welcome to attend. This inclusive, integrated approach was strongly supported by the young people. The role of CREATE in supporting young people to speak up and be heard and to advocate for themselves was also endorsed in a heartfelt way by the young people present. In a child protection system where foster carers, kinship carers and some professionals

report that they struggle to have their views heard, respected and taken into account, it is clear that agencies building the capacity for self-advocacy by young people plays a vital role.

Building a working partnership with the Department of Child Protection

The sector is calling for a more effective, mutually respectful working partnership with the Department of Child Protection (DCP) to improve the experience and safety of children and young people, as well as their carers and families.

The leaders of the Queensland and Victorian peak agencies, Lindsay Wegener and Deb Tsorbaris, outlined their approaches to achieving this goal in their states. Links to these video presentations are included above.

In the Evaluation Sheets completed by attendees, we asked: How could we improve a forum like this in the future? The responses included requests to involve DCP and other government departmental staff.

"Find ways to bring Government departments into the conversations. Speakers today were fantastic but I felt there was a lack of representation from DCP. If we want to achieve meaningful change, in the system and in the lives of children and young people, we need to come together across sectors and NFP/NGO and government."

Forum Participant.

More information about topics discussed at the Forum: Examples of work to make a positive difference.

The participants told us in their evaluation sheets that they valued the opportunity to hear about examples of work to make a positive difference. Here is information about programs discussed at the Forum in May 2022. It was only possible to hear brief snapshots of information. These are the kind of programs that CAFFSA members want to hear more about, with the opportunity to ask questions and discuss in small groups.

1.Prevention, Early Intervention and Reunification

Uniting Communities

Ruby's Reunification Program; Newpin; Jo's Residential Youth Care.

During a panel discussion, we heard briefly about these three programs run by Uniting Communities.

Ruby's Reunification Program

Ruby's aims to keep families together and young people out of the homelessness sector. "At the moment, while they're probably not preventative programs in the

purest sense, in that the children are currently involved in the child protection sphere, or in the homelessness sector, there is a focus on working with families and increasing their capacity and skills to be able to stay together as much as possible."

"On average, a Ruby's house works with 45 young people, and their families, each year. Last financial year, across our four houses in South Australia, of the clients who came to Ruby's asking for a reunification service, 79% went home, 18% went into the homelessness system and 3% went into child protection.

"Of the clients who came to the youth homelessness sector seeking accommodation, 59% went home, 30% went into the homelessness system and 10% went into child protection.

"We think one of the most important take-aways from the above stats is that, because of the amount of time Ruby's staff are able to spend with young people and their families, we can be confident that, if they go into the homelessness or child protection system, then there really was no other safe option for them. So, while we 'divert' a significant number away from these systems, government and funders can also be confident that the 'right' young people are getting a homelessness or child protection response. "

Links to more information:

[Ruby's Reunification Program | Uniting Communities](#)

[Ruby's licensing | Uniting Communities](#)

Newpin:

Newpin aims to return children in care to their parents. This program has been operational for approximately nine months in Northern Adelaide, with a new centre recently opened in Port Adelaide and a Southern site due to open in July. So far the program has worked with 23 families with 33 children (all under six years of age.) There have been eight families reunified over the previous nine months, meaning that 15 children were able to return home or remain with their birth families, having developed strong and positive relationships.

"Newpin is working with younger children and their families. Again, it is post removal, but it is providing those parenting skills, in connection to other services and interventions, that help them address all the different aspects of their life, such as housing, employment, addiction and everything else that's going on that contributes to children being removed. In one site over the past nine months, approximately 14

children have been reunited with their families and diverted from going into residential foster or kinship care, which, again, is just extraordinary on a human level."

<https://www.unitingcommunities.org/service/families-and-young-people/newpin>

Jo's Residential Youth Service:

Jo's offers a home and therapeutic support for young people who have been placed under the guardianship of the Minister. Here is a short video and podcast that provides an outline of this program.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qppfc4ZdeVo>

<https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/podcast/therapeutic-residential-care-the-example-of-jos-place/>

"I think the biggest call for a key priority for action is, whilst we do always need to advocate for the change on a systemic level and to government and within our contracts and funding, we also need to turn that gaze inward. And ask, How we can make those things happen within our programs, despite the restrictions we have on us at the moment?"

**2. Prevention, Early Intervention and Investment in the Long Term
ac.care Anglican Community Care, Mt Gambier SA**

"If we're not going to invest in early intervention and prevention, then we're just going to keep on working at the bottom of the cliff, trying to pick up broken kids and do something with them. And it's not going to work."

The focus of the contribution from ac.care was on transformative system change and approaches to achieve a collective impact with vulnerable families within specific communities.

Reference was made to data-driven and evidence-based programs, such as HIPPY and place-based work in Logan in southern Brisbane.

Logan

"In Logan in southern Brisbane they took the long term approach. They looked at the data about children from birth onwards. They said: 'We're going to find the 5000 kids in Logan who are way behind their developmental milestones. And our aim is that, by the time they turn eight, they are going to be at the same developmental stage as the average Queensland child. When they started to look at how that child travels

through the system, they found all the disconnects between the different layers of government. They found the different departments who don't even talk to each other. They are working to change that and that is what we need to do here in South Australia."

"About Logan Together: Logan Together is a long term, whole of community effort to create the best life opportunities for every child in Logan, in the south Brisbane area of Queensland. Employing a collective Impact approach, Logan Together drives coordination and cooperation between community stakeholders, education, health and social service providers. They have developed the Logan Together Roadmap to establish a framework to connect people in this work and support full community engagement."

Logan Together: <https://www.aracy.org.au/the-nest-in-action/logan-together>

HIPPY

HIPPY helps build parents' skills and confidence in their role as their child's first teacher. HIPPY supports parents to deliver a structured 60-week curriculum of learning activities designed to make children "school-ready" and develop a love of learning that will last a life-time.

"It works with families with children who are three and four years old. We're working with Aboriginal families to work out how to deliver this in a culturally responsive way. We now have waiting lists for Aboriginal families wanting support to get their children ready to go to school. We've been listening to our Aboriginal staff, listening to Aboriginal people and families and actually doing something about it, and being led by the Aboriginal community".

More information about HIPPY: <https://hippyaustralia.bsl.org.au>

3. Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People:

Penny Wright Guardian.

The Guardian, Penny Wright participated in the discussions at the Forum and members of her staff attended. The work of the Office of the Guardian provides the team with wide-ranging insights into the experience of children and young people. A future Forum for CAFFSA members could include a session that focussed on lessons learnt from the work of the Office about strategies to improve the lives of children and young people.

The work of the Office of the Guardian is explained here:

<https://gcyp.sa.gov.au/what-we-do/>

The three key priorities for action nominated by the Guardian for the Forum were:

1. **Increasing placement safety and stability**
 - a. implement robust placement matching processes across all care types
 - b. review carer (family-based and non-family based) **attraction** and **retention strategies**, including training and support
2. **Keeping Aboriginal children with family and ensuring cultural connection for Aboriginal children in care**
 - a. invest in early intervention services that are culturally-specific and involve community consultation
 - b. provide for the cultural needs of Aboriginal children in care – includes adequate scoping and relationship building capacity within DCP
3. **Increased and enduring services to support early intervention – for families before children come into care and when they are ‘returning home’ (i.e. reunification)**
 - a. More wrap-around services and more enduring services – beyond three months or six months – to buffer against the challenging times

It is a phenomenon that once a family appears stable – services withdraw – because there is a waiting list – but services need to stay in longer to support the family through inevitable challenges – or be activated quickly when needed again.

The Guardian expressed regret that her office does not currently have the capacity or mandate to advocate for young people who have left care.

Young Care Leavers are supported by Relationships Australia Post Care Support Services: <https://www.rasa.org.au/services/adult-health-wellbeing/post-care-support-services/>

4. Keeping Families Together

“Give us more time to work with families.” Service provider.

"Pay more attention. Give us time. Return calls. Do home visits. We need to feel connected to someone. Don't give a kid 20 social workers. Manage your workload." Young person who had been in care.

At the Forum, we heard from young people who had been in care and service providers that they needed more time and resources to work together and achieve positive results. Where it is safe to do so, children and young people want to be supported to stay connected to their families and their siblings. First Nations people at the Forum expressed this strongly.

There was a great interest at the Forum in hearing about programs to support families to stay together, while taking into account the trauma so often experienced.

A speaker from Anglicare SA referred to Safe Kids, Families Together:

<https://anglicaresa.com.au/safer-kids-and-families-together/>

An opportunity at a future Forum to hear from a range of service providers and their clients about their approach to keeping families together would be welcome.

5. Involving Other Government Departments in Future Forums.

The Departments of Health and Education play a significant and often nurturing role in the lives of children and young people and are very important in the prevention and early intervention space. Their staff are also keen to understand the needs and experiences of children in care.

At the Forum, young people who had been in care raised issues relevant to both Health and Education. The stress caused by moving to multiple schools was raised. Problems with gaining access to mental health services and concerns about the response some young people in care receive at Emergency Departments were also discussed.

Royal Commissions and Inquiries into problems in child protection in jurisdictions across Australia have recommended that attending training and professional development together improves interagency co-operation among staff from government and non-government agencies.

In the evaluation sheets, a number of participants requested that colleagues from the Department of Child Protection be invited to attend future CAFFSA forums. Following from the concerns raised at the Forum regarding interagency issues, this should be widened to include people from Health, Human Services, Education and other pertinent agencies.



Julie McCrossin AM, Forum Facilitator
17 August 2022.