

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Mrs Finocchiaro to the Minister for Territory Families:

Foster Care

- 1. How many Foster Care records have been found to have:**
 - a. Incorrect dates?**
 - b. Incorrect names of children?**
 - c. Incomplete reports?**
 - d. Conflicting information?**
 - e. Documentation completed tardily?**

ANSWER:

Territory Families holds records about foster carers and children in care in electronic and hard copy format. Electronic records are managed in the Community Care Information System (CCIS).

- a) There is no way to collect data about incorrect data entry, however there are governance resources to identify and correct errors. After an interaction with a child in care, case management staff record a progress note. The progress note is date stamped by the system with the date the record was created. The date the actual event occurred is recorded in the text of the progress note. Quality assurance processes include review by supervisor and Client Information Quality Officers. Errors can be identified and corrected following review by Implementation and Assurance Team.
- b) If an electronic record has incorrect details it can be updated by front line staff. It is possible for variations on the spelling of a child's name to be recorded. CCIS enables Territory Families to record the alias details of all clients, linking together client records.
- c) In electronic records a document remains open for ongoing editing and addition of information until it is recorded as being 'finalised'. This recognises that obtaining content to complete reports takes time. There are many documents in CCIS that are in progress pending finalisation.
- d) Territory Families sources information from a wide range of stakeholders. It is not uncommon for observations about carers and incidents to vary, for example parental versus school observations. Information received from a notifier may also conflict with the information obtained during the course of a child protection investigation. Given the nature of Territory Families work. A key role of practitioners is to assess and weigh up all available information and evidence to make decision is in child protection this is done on the balance of probability.
- e) Refer to c.

2. How many complaints have been received by Territory Families from Foster Carers?

ANSWER:

From 1 July 2018 to 31 March 2018, Territory Families, Practice Complaints and Investigations team received 33 complaints from Foster and Kinship Carers.

3. How many complaints have been made against Foster Carers?

ANSWER:

From 1 July 2017 to 31 March 2018, two complaints have been received by Territory Families, Practice Complaints and Investigations team in relation to a Foster or Kinship Carer.

4. How many Carers have misled the Department regarding their Aboriginality?

ANSWER:

Territory Families is not aware of any carers misleading Territory Families with respect to their Aboriginality. Family history and the carer's culture is explored in all carer authorisation assessments.

5. How many placement agreements are in place between Territory Families and Foster Carers?

ANSWER:

Placement agreements are required at the commencement of each placement. Territory Families has no automated way of reporting against placement information. As at 31 March 2018, there were 283 children in Foster Care households and 217 children in Kinship Care households.

6. How many unannounced residence checks have occurred since you implemented this policy?

ANSWER:

Since residence inspections under the new out-of-home-care Quality Assurance Program commenced in April 2018, 54 residence inspections have been completed. Territory Families is on track to complete at least 90 inspections by 1 November 2018.

7. How are you improving communications between SafeNT and Territory Families regarding screening and provision of Ochre cards? What funding is provided for this?

ANSWER:

Safe NT and Territory Families share information where possible under existing legislation. For example, Safe NT advises Territory Families of the names of persons whose applications for Ochre cards have been declined by Safe NT and this information is checked against Territory Families employees and carers. The *Care and Protection of Children Act* has existing information sharing provisions, however these are specific to information sharing about the child. Improved information sharing about carers and de-authorized carers is to be considered as part of the broad reform of the *Care and Protection of Children Act* and will be included in a discussion paper during 2018.

Territory Families is currently exploring the avenues to inform Safe NT when a carer is de-registered so that a review of their suitability to hold a Working Ochre card is triggered. This is ongoing work funded from within existing resources.

8. From 1 July 2017 to 31 March 2018, how many carer risk management plans were reviewed?

ANSWER:

Risk management plans can be put in place to support authorization for various reasons, this can include management of short term visitors or supporting carers to address temporary issues that may have arisen.

Territory Families have no automated way of reporting against these plans.

9. What funding is provided for training Foster and Kinship Carers in understanding trauma?

ANSWER:

Territory Families and the Foster and Kinship Carers Association NT currently provide a variety of training to foster and kinship carers including training related to trauma.

Territory Families delivers the 'Foster and Kinship Carer Induction' which is an initial induction training course (two days) for new Foster and Kinship Carers. Within this training content delivery there is a component providing an understanding and awareness of trauma. The Foster and Kinship Carer Induction Training Course was offered to Darwin and Regions for a total of 15 course delivery dates in 2017 and for a total of 13 course delivery dates in 2018.

In addition, Territory Families has a Service Agreement with the Foster and Kinship Carers Association NT which includes a funding arrangement for carer support. In 2018-19 the funding in this agreement for carer support is \$282,012. The carer support component includes activities around education and training for carers to enable them to provide quality care.

In 2018-19 a model for Aboriginal Organisations Supporting Aboriginal Care will be developed and implemented. Aboriginal organisations are the best placed to deliver effective support for Aboriginal foster and kinship carers. Aboriginal organisations will provide staff to deliver a family finding and carer recruitment service and would design and participate in family finding cultural training for child protection staff and kinship and foster carers which is tailored to the local Aboriginal culture.

Funding of \$500,000 has been provided in the 2018-19 budget, increasing to \$800,000 in 2019-20, \$1,180,000 in 2020-21 and ongoing budget of \$1,750,000 from 2021-21 for this initiative.

10. How are you involving children in decisions about their lives? How many child interviews were conducted in the presence of the carer from 1 July 2017 to 31 March 2018?

ANSWER:

Children's views are sourced through activities such as home visits and case conferences. More recently case managers have had access to Viewpoint. This is a national survey tool tailored to engage young people to contribute to care planning and support them to contribute to decision making about their care. Viewpoint continues to be available to case managers.

In 2018-19 a model for Family Group Conferencing will be develop and implemented. Family Group Conferencing is a structured discussion which can be voluntary or court ordered and is based on the following principles:

- children, young people and families have the right to be involved in decisions that affect them;
- families have the greatest investment in the wellbeing of their children; and
- decisions made with the family are more likely to succeed than those imposed from outside.

There is no automated way of reporting when a child has been interviewed with a carer present.

11. When will your review of Carer and Assessment Support processes be complete? Will you make the review public?

ANSWER:

Territory Families will review the Carer Assessment and Support Team (CAST) policies and procedures to ascertain whether there is consistent practice across the Northern Territory and determine whether any modifications are required to align them to the intent of the Commissioner's recommendation. The review will be completed by December 2018. Internal reviews as part of ongoing performance improvement are not generally published for an external audience.

12. The Children's Commissioner Recommendation number 5 on page 25 of the Commissioner's own Initiative Investigation into services provided by Territory Families is that Territory Families conduct community service checks of applicant carers. Are you doing this?

ANSWER:

Community Service checks as defined by the Royal Commission into Institutional responses to Child Sexual Abuse are an interrogation of information held by government agencies in relation to allegations of reports of child abuse and neglect. This scheme exists in New South Wales where it is underpinned by legislation.

Territory Families includes an interrogation of history of allegations of child abuse and neglect in its current assessment procedures for Foster and Kinship Carer applications.

Information sharing about carers and de-authorized carers will be considered as part of the broad legislative reform of the *Care and Protection of Children Act*.

13. How many potential criminal matters concerning carers (assault, negligently endangering life) have been referred to NT Police between 1 July 2017 and 31 March 2018?

ANSWER:

Territory Families Central Intake Team informs the Child Abuse Taskforce of any reports alleging a criminal offence relating to harm or exploitation (sexual assault, serious physical assault and neglect) of a child. This includes any concerns relating to sexual assault, serious physical assault and neglect of a child by a carer.

Central Intake Team and Child Abuse Taskforce discussions are captured in the notes of an Intake report and are not recorded in a manner that enables extraction of numbers.

Concerns for sexual assault, serious physical assault and neglect of a child may also be referred to Police in the course of a child protection investigation. Referrals

to Police are documented in progress notes or word documents and not recorded in a manner that enables extraction of numbers.

14. How many prosecutions against negligent carers have resulted in convictions?

ANSWER:

Police and Court hold source data about prosecutions and convictions.

Territory Families records indicate that a former non-government residential care worker was convicted on a charge of aggravated sexual assault of a child in care on 23 October 2017. The conviction stemmed from a charge made in March 2017.

15. How much has your agency expended on legal advice in relation to civil claims against the Department / CEO?

ANSWER:

Between 1 July 2017 and 31 March 2018, the Agency expended \$97,635 on legal costs in relation to civil claims against the Department and/or the Chief Executive Officer. This includes the costs of legal advice, counsel appearance fees and related disbursements.

16. How many applications for psychological services have been received by Territory Families from Foster Carers for children in their care from 1 July 2017 to date?

ANSWER:

Case Managers work with carers, the child and the child's family to identify services tailored to each individual child, these types of decisions are documented on the child's file, and are not recorded in a manner that enables extraction of numbers.

17. How many applications have been refused?

Refer to question 16.

18. How many Foster Carers have been registered / deregistered from 1 July 2017 to date?

ANSWER:

In the period 1 July 2017 to 31 May 2018, a total of 125 Foster and Kinship places of care commenced. In the same period, 83 Foster and Kinship places of care exited the system.

1 July 2017 – 31 May 2018	Commenced	Exit
Foster Care	51	49
Kinship Care	74	34
TOTAL	125	83

19. You state you are working with the Australian Childhood Foundation to develop and implement a therapeutic model of residential care. Has this model been developed?

ANSWER:

Territory Families has been working with the Australian Childhood Foundation (ACF) to train both Territory Families and non-government residential care staff in the ACF's therapeutic residential care model. The model, developed by ACF, focuses on building relationships with young people suffering from traumatic experiences. It emphasises the importance of consistency and routine in helping to build safety for young people in residential care.

The ACF therapeutic residential care model is now operational in two Territory Families residential care houses in Darwin.

20. With reference to the Safe, Thriving and Connected plan under the Youth Justice Output of Budget paper 3 page 253, how many children have the Transition from Care Officers assisted?

ANSWER:

A key responsibility of the Transition from Care Officers is to lead and manage systems that support case managers to proactively plan with young people. Transition from Care Officers co-ordinate and chair transition from care meetings for young people, their carers, family and involved services to plan a supported transition to adulthood. Since January 2018, in excess of 42 initial transition from care meetings have occurred.

There are currently 208 young people aged 15 to 17 in care across the Northern Territory.

21. How many new Transition from Care Officers have you recruited and what is the budget allocation for the new officers? Where are the officers located?

ANSWER:

Three Transition from Care Officers commenced in January 2018 to provide high level leadership, research, advice and project support in the design, delivery and evaluation of strategies that aim to support young people's successful transition from care to independence.

Two Officers are located in Darwin for the Greater Darwin and Northern Regions and one Officer is located in Alice Springs for the Southern Region.

Transition from Care Officers are employed under either a Professional 3 (\$98,959-\$110,829) or Administration Officer 7 (\$101,695 - \$109,403) band. The annual budget allocation reflects the wages of the three individual Officers.

22. How long after leaving care can care-leavers continue to access assistance from Territory Families?

ANSWER:

Young people who have left the care of the Chief Executive can access assistance from Territory Families until the age of 25 years, pursuant to the legislative provisions in the *Care and Protection of Children Act*.

A young person is defined as having left care if they have left the CEO's care; are between 15 and 25 years old; were last in the CEO's care for a continuous period of at least six months; and in the CEO's opinion, are unlikely to be in the CEO's care again in the future.

Exceptional circumstances may apply for young people who do not fit within the definition above, particularly if it is believed that they are vulnerable and require support.
