

UPDATE 59

Royal Commission – Out of Home Care



Tuesday 11 March 2015 – Day 2

Case study 24 continued in Sydney today with four senior bureaucrats with responsibility for out-of-home care from NSW, NT, SA, Tasmania and Victoria continuing their evidence about policies for the recruitment, assessment and training of foster and kinship carers and staff in residential care.

Simone Jackson, the acting Executive Director of Out-Of-Home-Care in the Northern Territory said staffing levels for out-of-home care services are a concern. She told the Commission that in the two jurisdictions in which she had worked there could sometimes be a deficit of up to forty per cent in staffing numbers in the sector.

"If people aren't invested, or there for long enough, you can't build a relationship that is meaningful," she said.

Tony Kemp, Deputy Secretary of Tasmania's Human Services Department, said the well-established theory that staff should spend eighty per cent of their time with children and twenty per cent attending to administration had been reversed in recent times.

"It has been an over-engineered, over-proceduralised process whereby workers spend more and more time driving desks than actually visiting and seeing children," he said.

Following the government representatives, Micaela Cronin, CEO of Mackillop Family Services along with Claire Robbs, CEO of Life Without Barriers and Connie Salamone, Director of Strategy and Services for the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency gave evidence on the same issues.

Ms Cronin told the Royal Commission that Mackillop Family services had been established in 1997 as an amalgamation of seven out-of-home care services previously operated in Victoria by the Sisters of Mercy, the Christian Brothers and Sisters of St Joseph.

She said Mackillop currently employs the 'Sanctuary' model of out-of-home care, which focuses on the organisation providing a trauma-informed approach to the case management of individual children in their care.

Ms Cronin said there were a number of key reasons to shifting to the Sanctuary model three years ago including reducing staff turnover, staff engagement and understanding of trauma informed practice and reduction in the number of particularly restraints of clients.

When asked about the impact of the new model on children Ms Cronin responded that while it is too early to tell "the assumption is that if we have a more trauma-informed workforce who are more stable and engaged, then that will lead to greater outcomes and better improved outcomes for young people".

Ms Cronin acknowledged that 'child-on-child' abuse is a serious issue in out-of-home care, and that assessment and planning processes for placement of children, with a trauma-informed response to the changing needs each of the children in out-of-home care is an ideal to which providers aspire.

Ms Cronin said recognising that all children who enter the out-of-home care system have suffered trauma, Mackillop Family Services is working to ensure they all receive the same assessment and matching to appropriate carers and programs to ensure the best possible individual outcome.

When asked to suggest areas for improvement in the sector, she said “I think one of the things we need to keep improving on is hearing the voice of the child... these are very traumatised children who often have experience of being disbelieved and punished for talking about their experiences. So how we embed processes that encourage them to speak and ensure that we are hearing their stories is a key strategy that we need to do more work on”.

The hearing will move on tomorrow to consider issues involved in the monitoring of children in out-of-home care.

The next involvement in the hearing from a Catholic provider will be on Monday 16 March.

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