ACWA NEWS

Your End of Year Wrap Up
November 2016

Superhero Sunday Raises the Curtain on Foster Care Week

ACWA kicked off NSW's 26th Foster Care Week celebrations in September with a massive Superhero-themed picnic day in the beautiful grounds of Western Sydney Parklands.

More than 1000 foster carers and children were treated to a day bursting with entertainment enthusiastically led by visiting Superheroes, Captain America, Wonder Woman, the Winter Soldier and Spiderman.

There was also a terrific show by Magic Brothers World, an animal petting zoo, a drumming workshop, mask making and a host of games run by volunteers from Western Sydney University's Lodestar program. There was food for all and prizes awarded for best costumes as well as a carer prize draw.

The picnic festivities began with a Welcome to Country by Darug man Chris Tobin, followed by an official opening by Minister for Family and Community Services Brad Hazzard, who then spent the afternoon chatting to carers and volunteers as he toured the picnic site with FACS Secretary, Michael Coutts-Trotter and Federal MP for Sydney Tanya Plibersek.

"This week helps us all to acknowledge the safe, stable, and loving homes foster carers create for so many vulnerable children and young people in NSW," Mr Hazzard said.

"They are doing a terrific job but we need many more individuals and families to provide emergency, respite, short-term and long-term care for children in need."

The theme of this year's Foster Care Week, 'Be part of an amazing journey – Foster a Child's Future', highlighted the ways in which foster carers can make a life-changing difference to a child by offering them a loving and safe home, instilling in them the sense of belonging and stability that will help them thrive and reach their full potential in life.

"Foster carers play an invaluable role in our community and out-of-home care agencies work hard to provide them the right support, training and guidance to ensure they are well equipped to meet the complexities and challenges they may face along the way," ACWA Deputy CEO Dr Wendy Foote said.

"NSW is lucky to have exceptional people like this in our community who are dedicated to giving vulnerable children and young people a safe second chance."

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A Message From the CEO

Welcome to our pre-Christmas update on what can only be described as 'interesting times'. We head into the festive season with the recommissioning of both residential care and foster care well and truly front of mind, all set against a backdrop of relentless media coverage that we have not seen for a long time.

Media scrutiny in and of itself is not an issue and is to be welcomed. However when the reporting has no coherent 'endgame' or even attempts to bring balance to a very complex and multi-faceted social issue, it becomes wearing and counter productive and, not least of all, fails the most vulnerable and vilifies the people who are striving and achieving tremendous outcomes for children and families.

One of the truly disappointing elements of the more recent media reporting was the ABC ***Four Corners*** report 'Broken Homes'. We expect this sort of 'exposé' from the likes of the ***Daily Telegraph***, but not from ***Four Corners***. There was no attempt at balanced journalism; no interviews with those who may have given a more rounded perspective or, heaven forbid, perhaps give some context and understanding of the complexities that leads us to these places. Nor was there anything remotely illuminating about the system or the national/international evidence surrounding what works and why it works. We didn't get to hear how children and young people experience the system when they are engaged with evidence-based programs delivered by competent well-trained and supervised staff.

This is not to be defensive. We know all systems should be geared towards continuous improvement and there are occasions when we get it wrong and the system can do better and look to more innovative solutions that address the unacceptable current volume of kids entering and staying in care. But demonisation and 'throwing the baby out with bath water' only exacerbates rather than facilitates and sends us looking for draconian 'quarantine and contain' solutions. You do not legislate and regulate yourself out of seemingly intractable social problems. Instead, you need to create a culture that is child safe and valuing.

Hopefully in NSW the recently released 'Tune Report' will create the shift in mindset where the community, rather than the residual out-of-home care/child protection system, is seen as the solution. If we keep looking for solutions in the same places we will remain stuck.

In an attempt to address the imbalance that characterised the ***Four Corners*** program I penned an opinion piece for the ***Sydney Morning Herald***, which we have re-printed on page 14 of this publication.

I don't need to tell the sector that what drives the demand in the child protection system and, to a large extent out-of-home care, are the fundamental failures of a procession of State and Federal Governments to deal with the structural inequalities in Australian society that cement increasing numbers of children and families in a cycle of intergenerational poverty with little meaningful way out.

The Federal Minister for Social Services Christian Porter displayed a stark example of this 'wilful ignorance' at the recent ACOSS congress in flatly refusing to acknowledge there was any lack of job opportunities in Australia for those willing to put themselves out there. This was in blatant contradiction to evidence presented in Anglicare Australia's recent report on job vacancies in relation to unemployment rates. There are countless examples where solutions proffered have no empirical basis to the known drivers and we continue to be offered placebos as an illusion of real structural reform. If our political masters choose to peddle such falsehoods then what hope do we have in addressing or even acknowledging the underlying drivers of child abuse and neglect in this country and, more to the point, who holds those levers?

I trust everyone will get to spend some down time with loved ones over the festive season. ACWA extends a sincere thanks to all who have worked with us this year for the betterment of the children and families in NSW. Your commitment and passion is noted and valued. We look forward to collectively making a difference in 2017.

Cheers
Andrew McCallum

New Protocol Aims to Reduce Contact of Youth in Residential Care With Police

ACWA CEO Andrew McCallum joined FACS Secretary Michael Coutts-Trotter, NSW Police Assistant Commissioner Jeff Loy and AbSec CEO Tim Ireland in the signing of a Joint Protocol (pictured below) in August aimed at lowering the number of young people living in residential out-of-home care coming into contact with the criminal justice system for minor reasons.

The Protocol was developed by the NSW Ombudsman based on extensive consultation with a number of relevant stakeholders including members of ACWA's Residential Care Providers Network.

The document contains guidance and strategies to help residential service staff manage young people's behaviour, and steps they should follow when determining whether a call for police assistance is necessary. It also sets out how local police will work with service providers in responding to incidents that do occur.

The Protocol notes that all parties "share a commitment to working collaboratively on early intervention and prevention strategies which support vulnerable people enhance their wellbeing and assist them to develop positive behaviour patterns which are less likely to bring them into contact with the criminal justice system".

The statewide roll-out is being overseen by a steering committee that includes representatives from FACS, the NSW Policy Force, Department of Justice, Office of the Children's Guardian, ACWA, AbSec, Youth Action, Legal Aid NSW, Aboriginal Legal Services, the Office of the NSW Advocate for Children and Young People and residential service providers.

FACS, ACWA and the Lighthouse Institute are currently working on a training package to support staff in out-of-home care residential services to implement the new Protocol.

The training module, which is expected to be available online in December, will include video content about trauma, its impacts, and working with young people who have experienced trauma. Two case studies are used to demonstrate how to implement trauma principles into practice. The focus will then shift to how to use the Joint Protocol to reduce the number of times that police are called to respond to disputes in residential out-of-home care services, using two case studies as a basis for the learning.

The module will be freely available to all residential care agencies and ACWA will be sharing the details as soon as it's ready to go.

Download your copy of the Protocol at: www.acwa.asn.au/sites/default/files/subsites/acwa/Downloads/jointprotocolforyoungpeopleinresidentialoohc.pdf

Congratulating our Community Leadership Graduates

ACWA recently hosted a special graduation day for our 2016 Community Leadership Program class to celebrate their achievements.

The day started with a panel of sector leaders sharing their wisdom with the graduates. Sylvia Grant (Aftercare), Gus Morgan (Uniting) and Jane Madden (NSW Ombudsman) all contributed what they had learnt from their own personal leadership journeys.

A key component of ACWA's Community Leadership Program is a workplace project that participants undertake under the guidance of their coach. This workplace project provides an opportunity for each participant to implement their learning, but also allows their employer to benefit from their employee's participation in the program.

As part of their Graduation Day activities, the graduates got the chance to share with their cohort the results of their project. The topics of these workplace projects reflected the changing nature of the sector, with focuses on process improvement, using the coach approach in times of restructure, building a foster carer recruitment and support program and providing leadership in times of change. Guests were treated to some extremely creative presentations, including a song and a story.

Registrations for the 2017 ACWA Community Leadership Program open in December. The program, which comprises workshops, individual coaching and webinars as well as the workplace project, runs from May to November 2017.

For more details visit our website: www.acwa.asn.au/ccwt/specialist-programs/community-leadership-program, or look under the Specialist Programs tab at www.ccwt.edu.au

ACWA would like to thank Hesta Super Fund and Community Sector Banking for their continued sponsorship of the Community Leadership Program.

Feedback for New NSW Care Approach

Members have until December 6 to provide valuable feedback on the Framework for Therapeutic Out-of-Home Care (OOHC), which sets out a series of principles for providing better support to children and young people in care.

Early in 2013, the Department of Family and Community Services, in partnership with ACWA and sector representatives, began developing a framework for Therapeutic Care to address the more complex needs of children and young people in OOHC who require trauma-informed practice and care.

Therapeutic Care is focused on ensuring that children and young people in OOHC receive full support for their complex, individual needs, given the trauma they have experienced.

The new framework provides guidance on supporting children and young people who are in Residential Care or Intensive Foster Care placements. At the centre of the new framework is trauma-informed care.

Comment is now being sought on the new framework and ACWA asks that agencies join us in encouraging people to contribute to the public consultation.

You can find out more about the framework on the FACS website: www.facs.nsw.gov.au/therapeuticcare

Please submit your feedback by December 6 to: TCfeedback@facs.nsw.gov.au

Child Protection Inquiry Appearance

ACWA CEO Andrew McCallum and Deputy CEO Wendy Foote appeared before a hearing of the NSW parliamentary inquiry into child protection on September 27 to expand on issues presented within ACWA's 33-page submission to the Upper House inquiry examining the role of the Department of Family and Community Services and non-government organisations in protecting children and young people at risk of harm.

In his opening statement Mr McCallum told the panel he has seen "a few" Royal Commissions and inquiries during the 40 years that he has worked in the child protection space.

"The results have not always advanced the cause of vulnerable children and families," he said.

"With respect to this inquiry, does the title and terms of reference lead us to ask the right questions?

"If child protection, as it is commonly understood, is our starting point we have conceded defeat and, as a consequence, we should direct our attention to seeking solutions in a residual rather than the child wellbeing preventative space.

"The drivers of child protection concerns do not reside in the conventional child protection system. As a consequence growing statutory forensic child protection is not where the solutions will be found, nor is seeking to extrapolate system-wide long-term reform from focusing on a series of unrelated, abhorrent, albeit horrific and tragic events. To use this as our starting point leads us inevitably to construct our vision to the extent that we see all solutions through this prism.

"Where does it lead us in discussion to such questions as: Do we as a society value children and families in a way that ensures all children are safe and nurtured? Are the community's expectations and networks available and accessible to ensure this happens?

"Solutions will not be found exclusively or, in fact, predominantly in more regulation and legislation. Child wellbeing is intricate and complex. It does not lend itself to meaningful community debate by sensational tabloid headlines, nor to be used as a battering ram for political advantage.

"We owe our most vulnerable better as the change we aspire to will take generations, not years."

See pages 49-55 of the hearing transcript to read ACWA's full response to the inquiry: www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-hearing.aspx?pk=6983

ACWA Shines in Student Education

ACWA extends a warm congratulations to our Principal Researcher Dr Robert Urquhart, who was the recent recipient of a University of Sydney Social Work Field Educator Award.

Now into their third year, these awards enable the university to recognise and reward the valuable efforts of field educators in helping students learn about social work practice and prepare them to work in the sector.

As part of our 2016 student placement program ACWA hosted two fourth year University of Sydney Bachelor of Social Work students, Kathryn Kicuroski and Barbara Taylor. The pair was involved in a number of activities and projects during their four-month placements, giving them a firsthand glimpse into direct practice in the sector and the theories that inform this practice.

In a reflection piece the pair wrote upon their departure from ACWA (which after publication on the Faculty website, went viral through various university publications and websites), Barbara and Kathryn described their experience at ACWA as "a varied, enriching and holistic experience that provides a valuable foundation for our entry into the social work profession". Turn to page 13 to read their full article.

Dr Urquhart (pictured left) was presented his award at the university's recent annual thank you seminar which featured guest speaker Dr Liam White (pictured right).

He said it was wonderful to receive recognition for the effort that ACWA puts into its student placements.

"ACWA's placements are very much a team effort from start to finish," he said.

Video Conferencing Set to Boost Accessibility to ACWA Events in 2017

ACWA has purchased video conferencing equipment to make it easier for members and training participants to access events and workshops in 2017. Importantly, it means that people based in rural and regional areas will have the option of being able to take part in ACWA's forums, steering committee meetings, joint events, and some CCWT workshops, without having to travel extensive distances.

Is attending by video conference as good as coming in person?

While you may not be physically in the room, you can still see and hear everything that is going on, and the people in the room can see you provided you opt to use your camera. In a well managed video conference, you will participate in everything that the people who are actually sitting in the room do.

Do I need to use my camera?

You don't need to have your camera on, however it will improve the interactive nature of the event if you do. People react differently when they can only hear someone, as opposed to when they can see and hear a moving person. It is much easier to integrate you into the experience if we can see you.

What equipment do I need to participate?

The video conference program can be easily accessed online, so you can use your computer or mobile device to attend an event. You will be sent a web address to log into and some information on what to expect.

It is best if you can be in a quiet room. Otherwise we will be able to hear the background noise over the video conference. You can get around this by keeping your microphone on mute and only turning it on when you wish to speak.

Remember, it is important to treat a video conference just as you would any other event – set aside the time and focus on it while it is happening.

Registrations for CCWT's 2017 courses are now open.

Visit www.ccwt.edu.au for all the details.

2017 CCWT Training Handbook Out Soon!

Keep an eye out for CCWT's 2017 Training Handbook, which is more special than ever because it marks our 30th anniversary of providing quality learning and development services to the human services sector. Over the past three decades, CCWT has seen many changes in the community sector and has continued to provide relevant professional development opportunities and qualifications to support the work of the sector.

In the 2017 Calendar you will find plenty of courses designed to equip you with the skills and information necessary to stay abreast of changing work practices in areas such out-of-home care, homelessness, as well as the advent of the NDIS (National Disability Insurance Scheme).

Alongside our annual training calendar, CCWT continues to offer a range of other Learning and Development opportunities including:

- In-House/Customised services tailored to your needs.
- Community Leadership Program - our outstanding program for new and upcoming leaders.
- Qualifications in community services, counselling, leadership and management, and child youth and family intervention at the Certificate IV or Diploma levels.

Sector Celebrates its Best and Brightest

More than 200 guests gathered at Pyrmont's Doltone House in August to celebrate ACWA's 2016 Achievement Awards.

Now in their third year, the accolades were announced as part of ACWA's 18th national conference, which saw more than 700 child and family welfare experts and human service workers converge on Sydney to discuss ways to address the effects of abuse and neglect on the lives of children and young people.

The award recipients were recognised across five categories for outstanding leadership, innovation, service provision, and a new category for honouring the contributions made by children and young people themselves.

ACWA CEO Andrew McCallum congratulated the nominees and recipients for their exemplary efforts, saying their accomplishments were a reflection of a sector that nurtures exceptional commitment, service provision, innovation, and empowerment for those it serves.

"These awards are all about recognising the passionate, dedicated individuals and organisations who are helping every day to make a difference to those most in need and, in some cases, breaking the cycle of generational disadvantage," he said.

Mr McCallum said he was particularly impressed with the array of talent, courage and determination demonstrated by candidates in the Young Person's Award category, which received a record 19 nominations from across NSW, Victoria and Queensland.

"The stories of how these young people have either been motivated by a philanthropic focus on the need of others, or heroically overcome their own life barriers to give back to the community are nothing short of inspirational; our future is in good hands," he said.

The awards went to:

Innovation

Winner: Central Coast Multi Agency Response Centre for its new multi-agency approach to responding to child protection referrals.

Highly Commended: Winangay Resources

Commended: SSI Multicultural Foster Care Service; and Ingredients for Life.

Service Excellence

Winner: Challenge Community Services Short Term Emergency Placement Program and Immediate Placement Program, which both offer 24/7 services for children and young people needing crisis and short term placements (pictured below).

Highly Commended: Aboriginal Aftercare Statewide Service

Honourable Mention: Youth Advocacy Program

Excellence in Education for Children and young People in OOHC

Winner: Department of Education Western Region Out-of-Home-Care Coordinator Anne Nelson, in recognition of her tireless and ongoing commitment over two decades to improving educational support for children and young people living in care in Western NSW.

Highly Commended: Mark Said; and Parker Jackson

Children and Young Person's Award

Winner: 17-year-old Marissa, whose courageous journey following a difficult start in life has seen her become a respected leader, role model and young person with clear plans and goals for a positive future.

Highly Commended: Hani; Rodneisha; Kailem

Commended: Ashley; Lennon; Cody; Carole; Hayden; and Bianca

Honourable Mentions: Ryan; Hamish; Koorianna; Astrid; Tia; Jacqueline; Severin; Melinda; Leticia; and Cody.

The Lifetime Achievement Award was posthumously awarded (pictured above) to the late Adele Horin for her outstanding work as a social affairs journalist for more than 30 years.

Through the Lens – ACWA16 Conference

Turn to the back page for more Foster Carer Picnic Day photos.

Superhero Sunday

Continued from page 1

Around 150 volunteers from both the Government and NGO sectors worked tirelessly to make the picnic a huge success, flipping burgers, painting faces, controlling traffic, and handing out goodies to the appreciative crowd.

Events were held right around NSW throughout Foster Care Week, concluding on September 17 with the annual Kids in Care Cup Aboriginal Footy Knockout in Wollongong.

Knockout Finish to Foster Care Week

This year's Foster Care Week celebrations culminated on with the 2016 Kids in Care Cup.

The event saw specially formed Aboriginal rugby league teams from across NSW converge on Sid Parrish Park at Figtree, Wollongong, to vie for this year's title. The regions represented included the Illawarra, South Coast, Hunter, Northern NSW, Shoalhaven, La Perouse and Marrickville.

The La Perouse Bummers (pictured) put up a heroic effort to emerge the ultimate victors, with a 36-18 win against south coast team the Yunimyna Warriors.

Now into its fourth year, the Kids in Care Cup statewide rugby league knockout competition aims to raise awareness of what fostering is all about and the need for more Aboriginal carers in NSW.

Event manager and Illawarra Titans Rugby League Football Club spokesperson Rod Broad hailed this year's event the "best to date".

"It was very community focused with a terrific outcome for the La Perouse Bummers," he said.

"A great effort was put into this event by all the teams involved as well as all of the volunteers who helped on the day spreading the message of the need for more foster carers across NSW."

La Perouse Bummers manager Jamie Ingram said the team was extremely proud to take out the 2016 Kids in Care Cup title.

"The name of the team is the 'La Perouse "LaPa" Bummers', which is a youth centre that is run out of Yarra House at La Perouse," he said.

"Boys who attend the centre form part of our team; we give them a chance to play men's football with some of the older boys from the area."

This year's Kids in Care Cup was hosted by the Illawarra Titans Aboriginal Rugby League Football Club and was supported by MacKillop Family Services, AbSec, ACWA's Fostering NSW project, FACS and Link Up NSW.

Regional Agencies Thank Their Amazing Carers in Style

Agencies around the state came together during Foster Care Week to host special thank you events for their foster carers, supported by ACWA grants of $1000 per region.

In the Illawarra, the annual Picnic in the Park event was held at Lake Illawarra PCYC and featured a pamper tent for carers as well as a host of activities including a sensory tent, a robotics display, soccer skills clinics and Aboriginal cultural activities such as rock painting and a warrior workshop. Nine agencies collaborated with the district Carer Reference Group to organise and host the event, which attracted around 200 appreciative attendees.

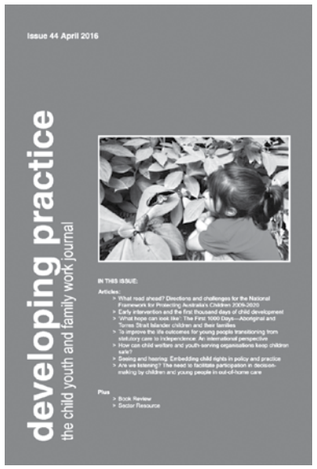
There was also a picnic event on the Central Coast where agencies partnered with NSW Sport and Recreation to host 370 foster carers, children and staff at the Point Wolstoncroft Centre. While carers were indulged with a massage and yoga station, their children and young people (as well as some adults) were expertly instructed in archery, rock climbing and high ropes at this beautiful facility on the edge of Lake Macquarie. The House With No Steps created a sensory wonderland with a huge ball pit, goop and snow for all to enjoy.

There was a strong focus on the appreciation of nature in the Northern region, with a day spent among the wildlife at the Macadamia Castle in Knockrow. The program on the day included kangaroo and farmyard animal feeding, meeting koalas, rabbit petting and talks about reptiles and wombats as well as train rides, mini golf and delicious hot snacks and pancakes.

Meanwhile, on the Mid-North Coast a shared experience and a sense of cultural connection with the Biripi Nation was on the agenda at their 'Fostering Cultural Connections' event. Carers, residential support workers, children and young people enjoyed a welcome to country and cultural tour lead by Aunty Pam and a fabulous performance by the Taree High School Cultural Dancers. This was followed by a barbecue sensation! All carers and residential support workers left with a small gift to commemorate the event. The day was summed up beautifully by one attendee named Shiralee, who said: "It was special, it made my heart sing".

Combined agency picnics were also held in Wagga Wagga, Goulburn, Maitland and Orange, and many organisations also rewarded their own foster carers with events that gave them the opportunity to enjoy a relaxed restaurant meal while their children were occupied with art and pizza or movies.

The week was rounded off as usual with the Kids in Care Cup Aboriginal footy event in Wollongong, a fitting end to an important week in which foster and kinship carers from all backgrounds are celebrated and thanked for their enduring commitment to providing safe and loving homes for our vulnerable children and young people.



Journal Puts Spotlight on National Framework Developments

ACWA has released its latest edition of ***developing practice*** (Issue 44), which is guest edited by Families Australia CEO Dr Brian Babbington.

The theme covered in this issue is 'Child safety and wellbeing: Latest national developments and future directions', with a primary focus on the Third Action Plan (2015-18) under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020.

The three key areas in the Third Action Plan are all explored: early intervention, with a particular emphasis on the first 1000 days of a child's life; increasing support for young people transitioning from out-of-home care so they can flourish in adult life; and supporting organisations in how they respond to keep children and young people safe.

One particular highlight of this edition of ***developing practice*** is an engaging article by Professor Kerry Arabena, Dr Stacey Panozzo and Dr Rebecca Ritte on the development of an Australian Model of the First 1000 Days.

In their article 'What hope can look like: The first 1000 days, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families', the authors argue for the need of an Australian model to recognise and respond to the ongoing impact of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

They have been able to establish two primary goals of the Australia Model which will lay a foundation for the future health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The first goal is the development of a model that offers support for a comprehensive and coordinated intervention that would address the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from conception to two years of age.

The second goal is to investigate and expand the concept of the First 1000 days in the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and collaborate with other institutions, services and communities in the delivery of the promises of the program.

The authors outline the five key features of the Australian Model, which are:

- The development and application of holistic interventions that include family-focused, case management approaches.

- The interventions applied across a multi-generational model of the family.

- Further engagement with men and fathers.

- Capacity building with the parents, family and the workforce acknowledging the diversity evident in urban, regional and remote contexts.

- Engagement with the next generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars.

Through the development and implementation of the Australian Model, there will be the opportunity to invest in family and community-based protective factors for the strength and wellbeing of our communities, families and, most importantly, our children.

The next edition of ***developing practice*** will be a special conference issue focused on papers that were presented at ACWA's 2016 Conference, ***Pathways to Protection and Permanency: Getting it Right for Children, Young People and Families.***

Visit ACWA's website to find out how to subscribe to developing practice or to purchase single issues or articles.

A Rich and Varied Learning Experience

Kathryn Kicuroski and Barbara Taylor are fourth year Bachelor of Social Work students at the University of Sydney who spent four and a half months on placement at ACWA. During their final week on placement they reflected on their learning experiences working within ACWA's Policy and Membership team:

As final year Bachelor of Social Work students, we have had the honour of undertaking our very last placement with ACWA. We both came into this placement with little knowledge or understanding of the out-of-home care (OOHC) sector or the work of ACWA as a peak body. From the very first day we were immersed into the core activities of ACWA, starting with attending the Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Out-of-Home Care member forum where we witnessed firsthand the function of ACWA as a conduit between the agencies it represents and the Royal Commission.

We also spent valuable time meeting and interviewing staff to help familiarise ourselves with their roles within ACWA and the services they provide member agencies. This gave us an understanding of the depth and breadth of activities in which ACWA is involved and introduced us to the many individuals we would be working with during our placement. The staff have been very helpful and supportive involving us in ACWA's many different activities. This inclusiveness has made it a very positive environment in which to learn and develop, both personally and professionally.

The huge variety of activities and projects that we have been involved in over the course of our time with ACWA have included: assisting with the development of training videos for the new Step-by-Step Assessment Tool; assisting in the ACWA Education and OOHC member survey; conducting an initial literature review for a grant application; and undertaking a mini research project into the use of the Fostering NSW Foster Forum.

We have also had the opportunity to attend a number of ACWA forums, including the Fostering NSW team's Statewide Recruitment and Retention Forum and the Critical Incidents Sector Forum, giving us the opportunity to learn more about the issues that OOHC agencies face. We also honed our writing skills by contributing a number of blog articles to the ACWA website and preparing reflective pieces to discuss in supervision.

ACWA's CCWT team members have also been very generous in providing training for us in areas of personal and professional interest. Since being on placement we have developed a broader understanding of trauma informed care through attending training on working from a trauma informed perspective with children and families experiencing domestic violence. We also participated in training that explored various ways of working with people experiencing mental illness and AOD (alcohol and other drugs) addiction.

During our time at ACWA we have also had the opportunity to visit a number of agencies, which has provided us with a glimpse into direct practice in the sector and the theories that inform this practice. For example, during a visit to Redbank House we got to learn about the use of therapeutic care for traumatised children in OOHC. We were introduced to ARC (Attachment, Regulation and Competency), an intervention framework they use for children with complex trauma, during a visit to Anglicare OOHC and our time spent at Jarrah House, Guthrie House and Richmond PRA's women's and children's program offered insights into mental health and AOD services specifically for women and their children.

We leave ACWA with increased understanding, knowledge and experience of the OOHC sector and the work it does, the issues it faces and the children and families it ultimately serves.

Our placement has been a varied, enriching and holistic experience that provides a valuable foundation for our entry into the social work profession. We would highly recommend this experience to any student or intern contemplating a placement at ACWA.

For more information about ACWA's student placement program or internships please contact Dr Robert Urquhart on 02 9281 8822 or robert@acwa.asn.au

Opinion

Good Residential Care Still Has a Place in our Welfare System

The following opinion piece written by ACWA CEO Andrew McCallum in response to the ABC's recent *Four Corners* program, 'Broken Homes', was published on the *Sydney Morning Herald* news site on November 17:

This week's ABC TV's Four Corners program delivered a searing denunciation of the residential out-of-home care sector. It painted a disturbing picture of inept practice, of unsupported staff, and of agencies more driven by self-interest than a genuine ambition to protect and nurture the children and young people in their care.

The bleak takeaway message was that the residential care system is impotent and that these homes are the last stop for 'the kids that nobody wants'.

I agree that stories like 17-year-old Renee's, whose pain was palpable as she recounted to Four Corners details of what she has seen and suffered during her short, sad life, need to be told.

I also agree it is absolutely critical that flaws within the system must be exposed if we are to continue to lift our game towards delivering a gold standard care that that this desperately vulnerable section of our population needs, that the out-of-home care sector should aspire to, and that the community at large has every right to expect.

I do however disagree with the blanket condemnation of residential care that emerged from the program aired this week.

Yes, the system is far from perfect. But there is still plenty of great work being done and improvements being made. There are many reasons why the system should not be dismantled.

The reality is that residential care has - and will always have - a hugely important role to play within the child protection system, particularly for those children and young people who are not suited, for whatever reason, to home-based foster care.

As international research demonstrates, when done properly residential care can have a profoundly positive and healing impact on young people traumatised by childhood neglect and abuse and, in doing so, improve their life outcomes in the long term.

In NSW there are many residential care providers doing an exemplary job in achieving just this, operating under intensive, specialised models of care that are wrapped in evidence-based therapeutic care principles which place strong emphasis on treating trauma and are focused on recovery.

These models give children and young people access to the specialists they need such as experienced social workers and clinical psychologists, education experts and speech therapists, and sees clinical specialists guiding staff.

There is a mounting body of evidence globally affirming therapeutic care as a meaningful healing option for children and young people living in residential care. This is reflected in the endorsement at the recent European Scientific Association on Residential & Family Care for Children and Adolescent Conference of a consensus statement, developed by The International Work Group for Therapeutic Residential Care, that defines and outlines principles for therapeutic residential care.

It is extremely heartening therefore to see NSW taking steps to develop and implementing a new residential care system that will ensure that any service providing residential care providers will be required to operate under a therapeutic model of care.

However, we need to see these kind of models operating not just in NSW but nationally if we are to ensure that all children and young people have a voice and the chance to heal so they can become the best person they can possibly be. And they must be implemented with fidelity. No cutting corners or placing children in homes that are ill-suited to their needs. No watering down of the services that need to be provided. Making minimum qualifications for staff an absolute given. But most importantly, giving the best care and having the brightest ambitions for our kids.

Member Profile

Creating Links
Communities for the future

1. Briefly describe the vision/mission/objectives of your organisation.
At Creating Links, we aim to develop resilient, productive and inclusive communities and families. We aspire to be a leading community service provider, strengthening and building community capacity.

We are an evolving, forward thinking organisation that values:
- Our socially and culturally diverse community
- Our ability to create opportunities to provide services and programs
- Our collaboration and partnerships with various networks; and
- Our role in providing services in partnership with government.

2. Where is your organisation based and what is its service area?
Creating Links is based in Bankstown and we have been servicing the Greater Sydney area since 1972.

3. What services/programs/initiatives does your organisation provide?
For more than 40 years we have been a leading multicultural community service provider that has continued to maintain a friendly, personable and individual client experience. We pride ourselves on the cultural diversity of our staff and the flexible holistic services we offer to the community regardless of age, religion, ability and culture.

Services we provide include:
- Child and Family Services
- Youth Services
- Disability Services
- Community Care Services
- Out-of-Home Care
- Community Programs.

4. What three words would best encapsulate the staff who work in your organisation? Diverse, dedicated, professional.

5. Tell us something most people would not know about your organisation. Creating Links was the first organisation to introduce the Inaugural Australasian Conference on Results Based Accountability (RBS) in 2009 in partnership with NSW Family Services (FamS).

6. Can you outline some of your organisation's greatest achievements to date?
Creating Links greatest achievements to date include:
- Successfully launching our Out-of-Home Care program in 2013.
- Presenting at the International Foster Care Organisation (IFCO) World Conference in November 2015.
- Piloting the Out-of-Home Care – Immediate Placement Program.
- We hosted the first Australasian RBS conference (in partnership with FamS).
- Creating Links has achieved full accreditation by several relevant industry oversight and funding bodies: National Quality Improvement Council, Office of the Children's Guardian NSW – Out-of-Home Care Accreditation, NSW ADHC Third Party Verification.

7. What is the most rewarding aspect of your organisation's work?
A highly rewarding aspect of our organisation's work is the strengthening and building of community capacity and the delivery of innovative and diverse services.

8. Is there anything else our readers should know about your organisation?
Creating Links has been acknowledged as a leader in the engagement of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities (CALD).

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