ACWA NEWS

Volume 3 December 2017

ACWA Association of Children's Welfare Agencies

CCWT Centre for Community Welfare Training

Let Them Learn: Tackling Educational Disadvantage

ACWA has embarked upon an advocacy initiative to raise the unacceptable levels of educational disadvantage currently experienced by children and young people living in out-of-home care in NSW.

Our 'Let Them Learn' project aims to bring about system wide change to ensure this vulnerable cohort has access to appropriate education that will prepare them for life.

It comes off the back of a study conducted by ACWA in 2016 with member agencies, which found that:
• One in five school aged children and young people in care are absent from school at any given time.
• One in three school aged children and young people in care did not have an Individual Education Plan.

In close consultation with our member agencies, ACWA has developed a Policy Statement of goals and objectives that we believe are essential to addressing and promoting educational inclusion and achievement of children and young people in care.

PwC Australia partner Mark Valerio opens the Roundtable.

As a key starting point for change, ACWA hosted a Roundtable in October of high level decision makers, stakeholders and experts in both the education and child protection spaces, from across government and non-government, to identify gaps and barriers in current practices and to help determine a way forward for NSW.

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A Message From the CEO

I warmly welcome you to ACWA's last newsletter for 2017, as we 'tumble' towards Christmas and the end of what only can be described as an eventful year.

There have been a few big ticket items that have been - or are about to be - visited upon us, which may very well set some of the agenda for 2018.

The report from the NT Royal Commission has been handed down and we will all be watching with interest as to how the huge number of recommendations it contains will be addressed without further net widening a system already under immense strain.

The much anticipated final report from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse is also soon to be handed down. This landmark report will, from all accounts, contain in excess of 600 recommendations, which cannot but influence and impact the activities of ACWA's member agencies.

Front and centre of this report will be what it means to be a child safe organisation. This is what goes to the heart of creating an Australia that truly values children, and it will require us to advance beyond finely crafted statements and checklists to enshrine a culture that transcends the mechanistic. We can also expect reparation to be a key element of the report, which will also have wide ranging implications for all organisations.

In November a private member's bill to have the Auditor General audit out-of-home care agencies, as per a recommendation of the NSW Upper House parliamentary inquiry into child protection, was defeated following debate in the Legislative Assembly. ACWA strongly opposed this bill, which would have seen yet another layer of oversight placed on an already heavily scrutinised sector, and we were pleased the NSW Government listened to our concerns. While the out-of-home care sector is not opposed to scrutiny, a move like this would have been costly for little gain given the many levels of oversight that already exist in NSW.

November also saw SNAICC launch the ***Family Matters Report 2017*** at Parliament House in Canberra. This report, which provides a comprehensive analysis of all the states and territories' child protection systems, makes for grim reading in respect of how Aboriginal children and families are faring. It headlines the fact that "without urgent action the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from family will triple in the next 20 years". A workshop I attended following the report launch made it abundantly clear that non-Aboriginal agencies must increase their resolve and commitment to ensure Aboriginal controlled organisations can assist communities to look after their children. Currently, the majority of Aboriginal children are placed with non-Aboriginal organisations.

On the national front, work is underway to solidify the draft Fourth Action Plan under the ***National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children***, to be signed off by COAG in the new year. This represents our last formal chance to consolidate the previous three National Framework Action Plans and imbed the structural mechanisms necessary to build on the findings of the Royal Commissions and look at sustainable pathways to address the terrible injustices highlighted by the SNAICC report. Early intervention initiatives such as the 'First 1000 Days', presented in the Third Action Plan, will be vital in turning the curve.

ACWA has commented on and consulted with our membership on the NSW Government's ***Shaping a Better Child Protection System*** Discussion Paper. In spite of an extremely and unrealistically tight deadline, we have managed to submit an informed response. Suffice to say, there are many diverse views out there and, even though the sector is in unanimous agreement of the intent of the proposed legislative amendments, there is still significant discussions to be had regarding the methods of achieving realistic sustainable results that will deliver better outcomes for children, young people and families.

May I take this opportunity on behalf of ACWA's Board and staff to thank all our members for your valuable support and wisdom over the past year. We wish everyone a safe and peaceful festive season, and look forward to continuing the good fight in 2018.

Cheers
Andrew

Shaping a Better Child Protection System: ACWA's Response

ACWA has responded to the ***Shaping a Better Child Protection System*** Discussion Paper with valuable input from our member agencies.

To help gather sector feedback ACWA hosted a consultation workshop in November, which was attended by 12 member representatives from the service spectrum of early intervention to out-of-home care (OOHC) and adoption specialists. We focused on the range of proposals raised in the discussion paper, from family preservation, restoration, mandatory reporting and Family Group Conferencing to contact orders, guardianship, adoption and supported OOHC. Thank you to all who attended and prepared feedback or case studies for this consultation.

ACWA also received written comments from agencies who responded to questions posed to members via our weekly e-newsletter or shared their draft submissions. We greatly value the input of our members, especially when responding to wide-reaching legislative amendment proposals.

ACWA welcomes the high level championing of continuous improvement and best practice in our sector, while noting a corresponding imperative to ensure that we do not embark on precipitous change at a time of significant sector reform.

Continued on back page

ACWA Workshop Searches for Emergency Out-of-Home Care Placement Solutions

ACWA held a workshop focused on emergency placements in out-of-home care (OOHC) in October.

Emergency placements have long been an area for joint sector problem solving and innovation. ACWA last focused on this area of the OOHC service system in 2014 in response to the FACS Options Paper on Immediate and Short Term Placements.

ACWA's October workshop was designed to facilitate robust discussion and arrive at potential solutions to address carer capacity for emergency placements. Around 30 senior managers from both FACS and NGOs attended either in person or via videoconference. During the workshop, participants heard presentations from FACS on current data on new entries to care. The room also heard from Barnardos Australia CEO Deirdre Cheers ***(pictured),*** who discussed program fidelity, while Fostering NSW shared insights into carer recruitment and retention for emergency care.

In preparing the agenda for the workshop, ACWA wanted to gain background information from member agencies to better understand what is working well and what needs changing. We invited responses and contacted a number of agencies to learn more about their experience of emergency placements and the work that has been done to date, including the immediate placements pilot in the metro area.

Some of the issues raised by agencies before and during the workshop included:

- Finding and supporting carers with the level of resilience needed to care for children and young people at short notice, and with high needs and often challenging behaviours.
- The need for increased information sharing between FACS and NGOs to support placement.
- The particular challenges faced by regional areas in terms of recruiting carers who have experience working with or caring for children and young people, and their 'on call' availability.

A number of potential solutions or considerations were also proposed. Some of these were short term solutions, such as greater collaboration between local Child and Family District Units and NGOs ahead of possible referrals and carer authorisation, while other ideas would require a longer term, systemic approach, such as developing a system wide approach to carer training.

ACWA has prepared a report summarising this work to date, which was presented at our recent OOHC Reforms Forum.

ACWA Hosts 59th AGM

ACWA Board Chair Bob Mulcahy.

ACWA CEO Andrew McCallum.

ACWA held its 59th Annual General Meeting on November 2, with the Board ballot resulting in the reappointment of Bob Mulcahy as Chair, the return of Jenny Kitchin as Ordinary Member, and Challenge Community Services' Chris Brown elected as the Board's newest Ordinary Member.

The Board's three Co-Opted Members, Mark Valerio, Amanda Bridge and Lorna Green all accepted extensions of their positions for a further two years.

ACWA's Board team for 2017-2018 is:
Bob Mulcahy (Uniting) – Chair
Deirdre Cheers (Barnardos Australia) – Deputy Chair
Lorna Green (Multiplex Australasia) – Treasurer
Nigel Lindsay (Wesley Mission) – Secretary
Alan Brennan (Pathfinders) – Ordinary Member
Chris Brown (Challenge Community Services) – Ordinary Member
Deb Tozer (CareSouth) – Ordinary Member
Jenny Kitchin (Anglicare NSW South, NSW West & ACT) – Ordinary Member
Maryanne Jacobs (MacKillop Family Services) – Ordinary Member
Mark Valerio (PwC Australia) – Co-Opted Member
Amanda Bridge (Burrun Dalai) – Co-Opted Member.

ACWA extends our appreciation and thanks to outgoing Board Member Wendy Knight (Foundations Care) for her contribution and commitment to ACWA during her time on the Board.

A full rundown of ACWA's activities and achievements for 2016-2017 is available in our Annual Report:

www.acwa.asn.au/2126

Compulsory Insurance: Agencies Urged to Consider NSW Law Changes

Members would be aware of proposed reforms to NSW laws requiring agencies to have insurance cover for child abuse.

These proposed changes were the subject of the NSW Government's consultation paper on civil litigation recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Submissions for this first round of consultation closed in September.

ACWA is aware of the potential significance of this issue for agencies and, in particular, of concerns raised around the potential impact of access and costs relating to insurance premiums. These issues will impact on the ability of agencies to deliver services.

We understand that the NSW Government will be publishing its preliminary recommendations at the end of December, after which they will hold further consultations with stakeholders.

In anticipation of this second round of consultations, ACWA is urging members to consider the proposed recommended changes in law, the requirement for compulsory insurance and, in particular, if those changes are implemented, how they may affect the services your agency is currently providing.

As a starting point, we encourage agencies to start collating information in respect of:
(i) Their current insurance coverage (scope of coverage and the cost of premiums and the deductible).
(ii) Any enquiries they have made in respect of molestation cover - and if so the feasibility of them being able to afford any molestation cover.
(iii) Information about the level of their current services for example, number of clients, level of funding.

ACWA is planning to host a session in the new year in relation to this issue, and will notify members accordingly.

If you have any questions contact: *wendy@acwa.asn.au*

NSW Celebrates Foster Care Week

ACWA raised the curtain on NSW's 27th Foster Care Week celebrations in colourful style with a massive picnic day on September 10, attended by more than 900 foster carers and children and supported by 160 volunteers.

The Sydney picnic was this year trialled in the new location of Blacktown International Sports Park Athletics Centre. While navigating this new location was not without its challenges, the picnickers enjoyed the extra space, shade and facilities including an accessible change room.

ACWA was fortunate to have corporate 'in-kind' support from PwC Australia, who sent along an army of volunteers, including the MC for the day, and facilitated provision of a range of sports activities for the children, as well as high quality steaks for the barbecue from Bindaree Beef and free Chobani yoghurts.

The event was officially opened by Minister for Family and Community Services Pru Goward, who then spent the day chatting with carers and volunteers as she toured the site with FACS Secretary Michael Coutts-Trotter.

Around the state, agencies came together to host similar events, supported with ACWA grants of $1000 per region.

Agencies in the Hunter hosted a hugely successful picnic in Maitland Park ***(pictured)*** which attracted 471 foster carers and their families who were treated to a wildlife show, a wonderful Indigenous dance performance, an African drumming workshop and even an RAAF flyover!

Around 50 carers and 30 children in the Port Macquarie region enjoyed a fabulous picnic brunch at Rose's Vineyard and Animal Farm where they relaxed in the beautiful garden surrounds and petted the baby animals, while carers in Coffs Harbour picnicked in the tranquil gardens of the Butterfly House as their children chased butterflies and navigated the outdoor maze.

In Armidale, agencies put on a Crazy Hair Disco, where carers and families got to dress up and boogie the night away, even participating in a boys versus girls dance-off, which incidentally ended in a tie! Everyone had so much fun that there have been calls to make the Crazy Hair Disco an annual event.

In the Illawarra, the annual Picnic in the Park event was held at the Croome Road Sporting Complex and featured a pamper tent for carers as well as a host of activities including the Barnardos park and play bus, a robotics display, bubble soccer, sumo suits, African drumming and a performance from the Illawarra Flame Trees Aboriginal dance group. Luxury gift baskets filled with goodies donated from local businesses were raffled off to delighted carers.

The Western region promoted a 'Get Active' theme for their barbecue picnic lunch in Molong Recreation Park, with activities including a jumping castle, Zumba dancing, cricket, running races, parachute games, egg and spoon and three-legged races.

The Northern region entertained around 450 guests at their annual Family Fun Day, while carers on the Central Coast also gathered for a fun-filled picnic day and agencies in the Murrumbidgee region hosted a barbecue picnic in the Wagga Wagga Botanical Gardens.

Around the state, many organisations also rewarded their own foster carers with morning teas and restaurant dinner events to express their sincere thanks for the valuable work they do every day.

Foster Care Week concluded with the annual Kids in Care Cup Aboriginal Footy Knockout in Wollongong. The final results after a long day of football saw the LooFern team beat the La Perouse Bummers 14 - 12 in a hard fought grand final match.

Turn to pages 8 & 9 for more Foster Care Week photos.

Let them Learn: Tackling Educational Disadvantage

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The event was designed in association with the NSW Advocate for Children and Young People, who shares ACWA's commitment to advocacy for vulnerable children and young people while bringing a whole of government perspective to the issue, and was sponsored by PwC Australia.

The program included presentations from leading international academic Professor Judy Sebba (University of Oxford), as well as Deputy NSW Ombudsman Steve Kinmond, NSW Children's Guardian Janet Schorer, NSW Children's Court President Judge Peter Johnstone, Royal Children's Hospital paediatrician Dr Karen McLean, NSW Advocate for Children and Young People Andrew Johnson, PwC partner Zac Hatzantonis, FACS Deputy Secretary Deidre Mulkerin, and NSW Department of Education representatives Robyn Bale (Executive Director, Learning and Wellbeing) and Trish Ladogna (Child Protection Services Director).

"ACWA is extremely mindful that, in addressing the educational access and achievement of children and young people in out-of-home care, no single agency can resolve the complex issues faced by this at risk group," said ACWA Deputy CEO Dr Wendy Foote.

"Broadening the conversation to include multiple stakeholders recognises that this is an issue that not only impacts on all stages of the human life span but also ripples across the community, impacting on broad social and economic policy, tertiary education and workforce participation."

ACWA extends our deepest gratitude to our member organisations for the indispensible voice they have brought to this project so far. We look forward to their further involvement as we continue to work towards change.

We also convey our thanks to corporate sponsor PwC for its support and commitment to ACWA's work as the peak body for child and family welfare in NSW.

Key project documents, including ACWA's *Engagement of Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care in NSW* report, can be found on our website:

www.acwa.asn.au

Andrew McCallum (ACWA), Bob Mulcahy (Uniting), Mark Valerio (PwC), Wendy Foote (ACWA), Judge Peter Johnstone (NSW Children's Court), Gillian Brannigan (ACWA), Andrew Johnson (ACYP), Robert Urquhart (ACWA), Kelly Tallon (ACYP), Melody Stack (ACWA).

Hope Brown (CREATE), Laura Sutton (Macarthur Legal), Geraldine Gary (Catholic Commission of NSW), Fleur Beaupert (Children and Young People with a Disability Australia).

Sophie Trower (YWCA), Geraldine Gray (Catholic Education Commission of NSW), Peter Grace (Catholic Education Commission of NSW).

Simon Walsh (Allambi Care), Robert Urquhart (ACWA), Mark Said (Allambi Care).

ACWA CEO Andrew McCallum sets the scene for the day's discussions.

NSW Advocate for Children and Young People Andrew Johnson.

Roundtable facilitator Amy Brown (PwC) & Cara Langley (Association of Independent Schools of NSW).

Steve Kinmond (NSW Deputy Ombudsman), Deidre Mulkerin (FACS), Lynne Bailey (NSW Department of Education).

Sue Madden (Anglicare), Janet Schorer (NSW Children's Guardian), Elyse Cain (NCOSS).

Foster Care Week 2017 Celebrations

Some craft materials
generously supplied by:
REVERSE
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Remembering Linda Mondy: A Lifetime of Achievement

ACWA is deeply saddened by the loss of our sector colleague and former Board Member Linda Mondy, who passed away in August. Australia's child and family welfare sector is all the better for having had her work in our midst.

Innovator, leader and a mentor to so many, Linda dedicated her 50-year career to preventing child abuse and helping families break the cycle of disadvantage. Her deep and enduring commitment to enhancing out-of-home care and child protection practice has created a lasting impact in social welfare service delivery in Australia.

Linda began her career in 1965 as an administrative clerk in the 'Unmarried Mothers' department of London's Tottenham Town Hall. This work fanned the flames of her lifelong devotion to child and family wellbeing.

She commenced her training as a social worker in 1972 and went on to work in some of London's most disadvantaged communities before immigrating with her family to Australia in 1987 where she took up a role as a senior social worker at the St Vincent's Boys Home at Westmead. The five years Linda spent working within St Vincent's family restoration program was fertile ground for furthering her knowledge of therapeutic practice and prevention strategies.

Linda joined Uniting in 1993, where she served in numerous senior management and executive roles until her retirement in 2015. During this time she spearheaded the implementation of a strengths-based practice model across the organisation, an approach which has underpinned Uniting's work ever since.

In 1997 Linda was awarded a Churchill Fellowship, which ultimately allowed her to successfully introduce the United Kingdom 'Newpin' program to Australia. This early intervention model, which now operates in several states across Australia, was chosen in 2013 as the first Social Benefit Bond pilot in the nation. This achievement says much about Linda and her determination to bring strong evidence-based programs to the forefront of welfare practice.

As a leader and mentor, one of Linda's strengths was her ability to draw on her vast work experience and social work skills to lead staff to explore creative and practical options for issues they faced. Indeed, 'What would Linda do?' became a common catchcry within the Uniting workplace when it came to decision-making and problem solving. She was equally generous in mentoring those working outside her organisation, such was her passion and commitment to positive, creative social work practice.

Linda was a proud social worker who believed passionately in the values and ability of social workers to challenge issues and propel social change.

She was admired and respected by all who worked with her over the years, and will be missed enormously.

Congratulating Our 2017 CLP Graduates

ACWA recently celebrated the effort and achievements of our 2017 Community Leadership Program (CLP) class with a graduation event.

This latest group of graduates join our alumni of more than 150 professionals from across a diverse range of fields including education, health, community services, local councils and peak bodies.

The special day provided the cohort the opportunity to reflect on their nine-month leadership and development journey and share the results of their individual workplace projects, before being presented their graduation certificates.

ACWA conveys our deep thanks to Hesta Super Fund for its continued sponsorship of this valuable program, which has been challenging and nurturing new leaders in the community and human services sectors since 2008.

To find out about our 2018 program contact:

leadership@acwa.asn.au

Top: CCWT Director Linda Watson thanks executive coach Maryanne Perry for her vital role in the CLP program.

Centre: Mark Ashby (Hesta) and graduate Clare Mayoh (Mission Australia).

Right: Mark Ashby (Hesta) and graduate Leetahl Elmsly-Smith (Anglicare).

Below: The exhuberant CLP class of 2017.

Agencies Explore Evidence Informed Programs and Practice

Participants got the chance to engage interactively with expert presenters at ACWA's recent Outcomes Day.

ACWA'S Best Practice Unit (BPU), in partnership with the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS), brought together a full house of leading experts and academics, NGO managers and practitioners, policy makers, data analysts, private and public legal practitioners, and training specialists in October for the sector's first ever 'Client and Performance Outcomes Day'.

Participants engaged interactively with expert presenters, with the discussions focused on the practicalities of achieving measurement and procurement practices that deliver better outcomes for children accessing permanency support services.

The keynote speaker, Associate Professor Robyn Mildon (Executive Director, Centre for Evidence and Implementation), highlighted that improving outcomes, rather than compliance, should be the focus of regulations and monitoring. Robyn skilfully unpacked what evidence informed programs and practices should look like on the ground in child focused service delivery, calling on agencies to be "critical consumers" of research and other evidence who work in close partnership with universities, implementation experts, peak bodies and other intermediaries to achieve innovation.

She neatly encapsulated the ethos of evidence informed practice where the outcomes for the individual child are at the forefront of decision-making, saying:

> *"An outcomes-based approach encourages us all to focus on the difference that we make, and not just the inputs or processes over which we have control. Each service implementer has an interest in achieving outcomes because he or she is accountable to the population served by their service."*

Participants also heard from Daniel Barakate (Director, Projects, Performance and Innovation, FACS) and Marilyn Chilvers (Executive Director of FACS Research and Analysis), who gave insightful presentations on the application of two key outcomes frameworks for practice that focuses on the child – the NSW Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) and NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework, respectively.

A practitioner panel facilitated by Jamie Hodgson (State Director, Key Assets) joined by Alister Whitehead (Therapeutic Foster Care Caseworker, MacKillop) and Kate Spalding (Project Manager, Implementation, Parenting Resource Centre) shared important practical learnings from their agencies' hands-on experience of the NSW QAF trial.

The expert presenters also addressed the relationship between the NGO sector and government that would best support children achieving desired outcomes. Associate Professor Ann Nevile (Centre for Social Research and Methods, ANU) detailed the critical role of Government in enabling service providers, observing:

> *"Service providers will be able to achieve good outcomes for clients when governments see their role as creating the right enabling environment rather than purchasing contractually specified outputs from non-government organisations."*

Wearing her hat as a doctoral researcher, Jenny Mason (General Manager, Policy and Research, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and former Director-General of then DOCS), spoke compellingly on the theme of 'Killing the golden goose: purchaser provider relations in the OOHC Sector'.

Adele Brooks (Principal Policy Officer, Partnerships FACS) shared a funder's perspective on monitoring outcomes and compliance, and Associate Professor Gaby Ramia (Department of Government and International Relations, University of Sydney) powerfully summarised the important 'take-homes' from the day to close the program.

Experts Have Their Say on Measuring Therapeutic Outcomes for Children

Distinguished implementation expert Martha J. Holden, Dr Debbie Sellers, Research Director at Cornell University Residential Child Care Project and Dr Diana Boswell, Cornell Instructor, Therapeutic Welfare Interventions, were welcome return visitors to ACWA's Best Practice Unit (BPU) in September.

Martha and her colleagues, joined by their Australian child welfare agency partners, gave a day of stimulating presentations to an audience of 45 child welfare and legal practitioners, academics and policy makers.

The CARE model is a multi-level program for improving therapeutic outcomes for children living in out-of-home-care. The model has recently received a Scientific Rating of 3 (Promising Research Evidence) and High Child Welfare System Relevance Level by the California Evidence Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare.

Using rich case studies, the Cornell team and their Australian partners Life Without Barriers and UnitingCare Queensland outlined the practical application of an evidence informed therapeutic residential CARE model, and in particular to tracking outcomes. As Daniel Barakate, Director, Projects, Performance and Innovation, FACS, noted in his closing remarks, the considered and careful approach to measuring outcomes outlined by the presenters resonated with key Outcomes Frameworks that are being implemented in NSW such as the Quality Assurance Framework.

As a model developer and leader in the child welfare field, Martha aptly reminded the audience of the first principle she applies when examining program outcomes. She said whether practitioners or researchers, we are each tasked with helping children in our care to succeed, before quoting the words of Vietnamese peace activist and meditation teacher Thich Nhat Hanh:

"When you plant lettuce, if it does not grow well, you don't blame the lettuce."

Above: Martha J. Holden shares her insight with the room. Below: Robert Urquhart & Wendy Foote (ACWA), Diana Boswell, Debbie Sellers & Martha J. Holden. Left: Diana Boswell at the podium.

Collaborative Recruitment Targets LGBTQI Community

On the last Sunday in October, ACWA's Fostering NSW team was joined at the glorious Parramatta River Foreshore Reserve by staff from Barnardos, Challenge Community Services and Creating Links in hosting a stall and information session at the Parramatta Pride Picnic Day Parramatta Pride Picnic Day on behalf of the Metro Recruitment Working Group. The Benevolent Society, Life Without Barriers and Uniting were also present on the day ensuring that attendees were given every opportunity to find out more about providing permanency support for the region's vulnerable children and young people.

Some picnickers arrived early to set up in the shade and enjoy the beautiful warm and friendly atmosphere to the full, while many arrived at around midday having marched through the streets of Parramatta in support of marriage equality.

As well as hosting a combined agency stall, Fostering NSW had arranged to give an informal presentation in the marquee space for anyone wishing to explore fostering and adoption.

This was a trial of the idea of capturing people in situ at community events and it ended up working differently to how we had imagined. Because numbers were small, the session became more of a 'clinic', where people could speak at length one-on-one with agency staff and pick up materials from all of the agencies to peruse at their leisure. We met a couple of extraordinary people who have since made enquiries and been referred on to agencies that best matched their situations.

While it was a boutique event with a limited audience, we all agreed that having a presence was very worthwhile.

The picnic really got into the swing of things with the arrival of the marching band.

Above Left: Leigh-Anne Norris (Barnardos), Karen Francis (Barnardos), Sharon Broady (ACWA) & Mary-Cheryl Arato (Challenge Community Services).
Above Right: Karen Francis (Barnardos Australia) & Weiyan Wang (Creating Links).

Special thanks to Weiyan Wang (Creating Links), Mary-Cheryl Arato (Challenge Community Services), Karen Francis and Leigh-Anne Norris (Barnardos) for giving their time to support us on the day. It was a real example of the dedication and collaboration that goes on every day in our sector, and is very much appreciated.

2018 Membership Fees Now Due

Pay before January 1, 2018 to secure your **5% early bird discount**

To apply for ACWA membership visit:
www.acwa.asn.au/membership/membership-form

Corporate Sets a New High Supporting Foster Carers in the Workplace

Opinion Piece

ACWA's Acting CEO Dr Wendy Foote reflects on changes announced recently by PwC Australia to its parental leave policy that will support staff members who are foster and kinship carers:

An interesting development has taken place in corporate Australia recently, with accounting giant PwC unveiling details of its new HR policy that aims to make life a little easier for their employees who are juggling work responsibilities with their commitment to fostering vulnerable children.

This is hardly front page news. Not when compared to the big business issues that usually grip our news cycles – the mergers and bankruptcies, the swirling share prices, staff cuts and salacious board scandals.

Nevertheless, the announcement of PwC's new foster friendly employment policy is significant news for the child and family welfare sector because not only does it recognise the critical work of foster carers who provide safe, loving homes to some of our community's most vulnerable children, but it also has potential to encourage more people to open their homes and foster. It is no secret that there is a chronic shortage of foster carers in our community. Carer recruitment is a vexed issue that continues to test our sector, and having an employer that understands and supports a staff member's commitment to fostering could be a deciding factor for someone who is considering becoming a foster carer.

More broadly, it represents a small, but encouraging step towards a greater goal that involves all children being given the opportunity to thrive in a loving family. And surely this is something that goes to the heart of every civil society?

The new employment benefits introduced by PwC give foster carers and kinship carers working in the organisation full paid parental leave. They can take the full 90 days in one lump, or work two or three days a week over a longer period of time, giving them vital flexibility they might need to respond to the needs of the children who come into their care – and often at short notice.

For example, when a child is placed with a new foster carer they can be, at best, anxious and upset or, at worst, severely traumatised as a result of the experiences that have brought them there. Both carer and child have many challenges to navigate during this settling in period. It is a critical time when trust, understanding and familiarity is forged. Being granted leave from work during this time is therefore essential. It means the carer can focus on the needs of these children without being worried about their workplace commitments or their financial situation

Combining the responsibilities of fostering with the workplace can be a tough ask, but a healthy dose of corporate backing can certainly help promote the process. By supporting staff who are foster carers PwC is

actively supporting one of the most vulnerable populations in our society. It is a great example of good corporate governance that is compatible with compassion, and for this they should be applauded.

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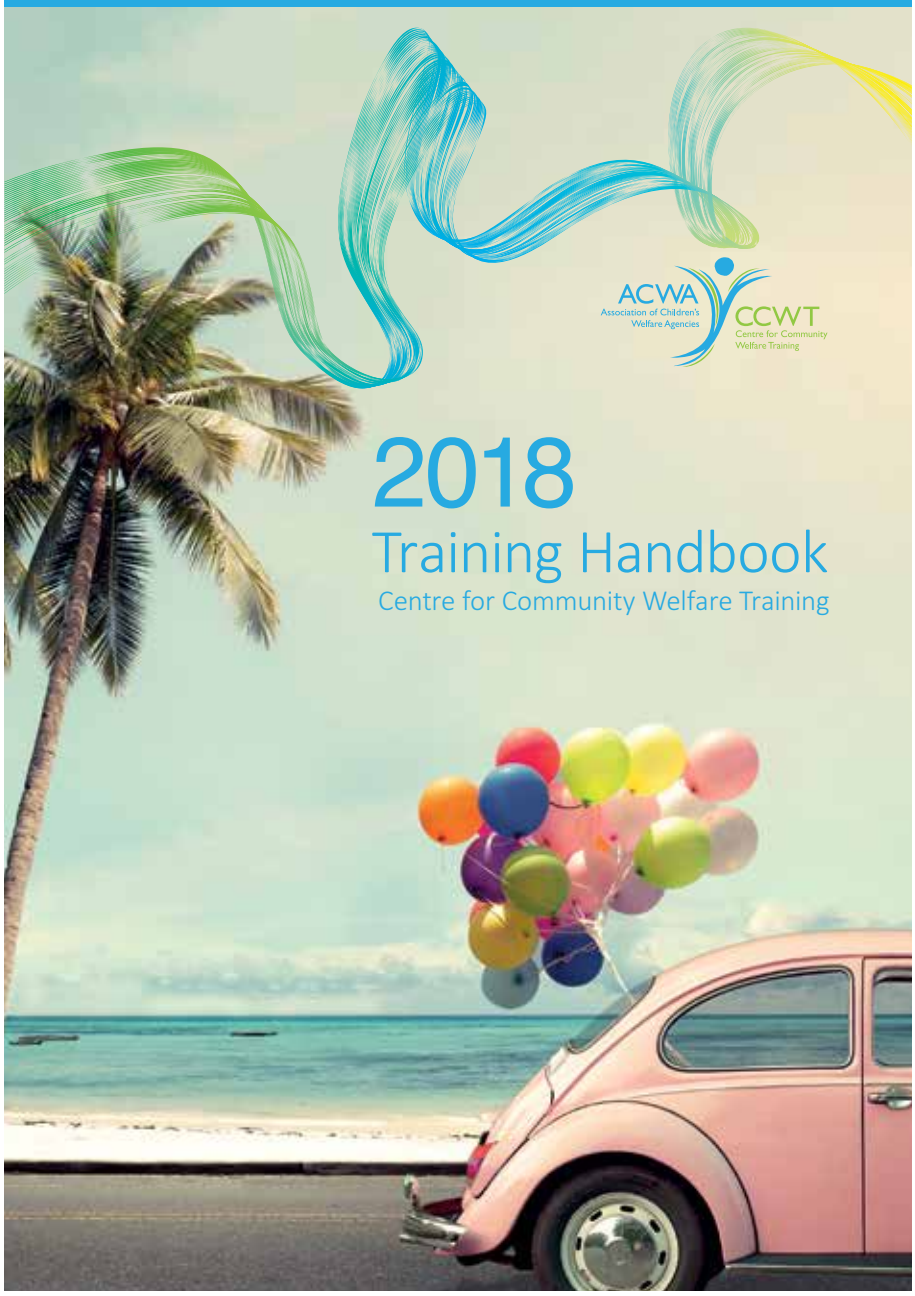
Hot Off The Press!

Our CCWT Training Handbook is on its way to you – just in time for Christmas



Continued from page 3

Due to the significant amendments proposed in the discussion paper and the limited timeframe provided for sector consultation, ACWA has also raised concern that the implications and any unintended consequences of the changes have not been fully explored. As a result, we have called for an exposure draft to be made available for further consultation if the proposals outlined in the discussion paper are progressed.

Some of the proposals contained in the discussion paper are already achievable under the current legislative framework and supported by recent changes in policy direction. ACWA notes that practice and operational changes are continuing and can be further supported by the provision of specific support. The Permanency Support Program Sector Needs Analysis is one way that ACWA is working to identify the supports needed to build capacity.

Other key points ACWA has highlighted in response to the discussion paper include:

- A call for a greater focus on ongoing as-needed support for those with a care experience following restoration or other permanency pathways such as guardianship and adoption.
- A call for a greater focus on engaging families throughout the permanency support program, acknowledging that the focus needs to be on supporting the child/young person for life and lasting, positive relationships are a key way of achieving this.
- A need to review FACS funding package guidelines in light of any changes as a result of the proposals outlined in the discussion paper.
- A need to increase family support service capacity in regional, rural and remote areas to provide appropriate referral pathways for families in need.

Please contact ACWA's Policy and Membership Team if you have further questions or feedback on the ***Shaping a Better Child Protection System*** Discussion Paper.