ACWA NGO Sector Permanency Support Program (PSP)

Additional Considerations

B1: Analysis of three open-ended survey questions

© ACWA/CCWT 2017

Urquhart, R. (2017). ACWA NGO Sector Permanency Support Program (PSP) Needs Analysis Overview Report December 2017: Addendum

Additional Considerations

B1 Analysis of three open-ended survey questions

1. Executive summary B3

2. Methodology B3

3. Other critical needs to consider B4

4. Other potential solutions B10

4. Other comments B13

List of tables and figures

Table B1 Are there any other areas not listed above that you consider important in supporting your permanency practice? B6

Table B2 Are there any other solutions not mentioned above, that you think would address the permanency practice gaps? B10

Table B3 Do you have any other comments you would like to share about the Permanency Support Program or your permanency needs, that were not included in this survey? B13

© ACWA/CCWT 2017

1. Executive Summary

Survey respondents in the NGO Sector needs analysis were asked to express their views on any additional considerations from those that had been identified in the focus group findings, via the inclusion of three open-ended survey questions.

In general, the analysis of the open text data corroborates the findings from the closed questions, whilst elaborating on the opinions expressed and providing additional insights and context.

Three themes were most prominent in terms of other comments about perceived critical needs: the need for clear role expectations and lines of accountability and responsibility; the need to support and skill up carers including potential adoptive parents and guardians, emergency placement and long-term foster carers; and building capacity to work with birth families both for contact and restoration.

Four themes were revealed in terms of other comments about potential solutions that respondents thought were important: these were collaboration and information exchange; supporting carers; other potential solutions; and concerns about funding levels. Again, these themes were largely complementary to views expressed in the closed question survey data.

Respondents were also invited to make any other comments they wished to make. They tended to provide further context for their views expressed in the closed questions, or reinforce the explicit proposed solutions that had emerged from the focus group findings. A dominant theme in their responses was concerns about uncertainty, risks and/or unintended consequences of the model and the reform implementation process. Four other themes emerged from the data exploration: other potential solutions; supporting carers; training and recruitment and anticipated benefits. Examples of verbatim comments have been provided to illustrate the major themes.

2. Methodology

Data format

Two of the three questions were in an "*other, please specify*" extension-type question format. The purpose of these questions were to ensure all options were identified in relation to respondents' perceived critical needs, and their priorities for the potential solutions. The other question was in a general "*any other comments*" question format. The latter question sought their freely expressed views based on their general experiences of the overall topic, to help illuminate any important topics missed by the closed questions.

© ACWA/CCWT 2017

In terms of potential depth of data, respondents were given a small amount of space (five lines or fifty characters) for their answers. Respondents were also invited to submit a written attachment if they wished, to give respondents a further opportunity to write whatever they liked, for as long as they liked, and elaborate and expand on their responses, although this question did not provide any additional information.

Analysis

A post hoc coding approach was employed. The principal investigator read the open text responses, and a start list of approximately 12-20 codes to thematically describe the contents was devised. The data was then manually coded. Codes were included either because of the strength of number of respondents who mentioned it, or the strength in feeling within a few comments. Other members of the needs analysis team provided with the coded data, to check agreement on assigning the codes.

The number of respondents making the comment and illustrative verbatim quotes are provided below. It should be noted that whilst only specific number of respondents may have mentioned an issue, it may well be relevant to many more who did not choose to make a comment (O'Cathain & Thomas, 2004)[1]. No other identifying information has been provided to protect participant confidentiality. Potentially identifying comments have either been slightly modified to maintain participant meaning whilst changing some person or agency attributes, or otherwise not included to avoid the risk of deductive disclosure.

3. Other critical needs to consider

Survey respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with a list of potential needs that had been identified through the focus group discussions as the critical areas for improvement of NGO sector permanency practice. Respondents were then asked: *"Are there any other areas not listed above that you consider important in supporting your permanency practice? Please list."*

Given the format, responses are necessarily framed by the context provided by the explicit list of options given. The list of skills, training and resources potential needs given to respondents was:

- Assessing parents capacity for restoration

[1] O'Cathain, A. & Thomas, K.J. (2004). "'Any other comments?' Open questions on questionnaires – a bane or a bonus to research?" *BMC Medical Research Methodology.* **4**:25.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-4-25

© ACWA/CCWT 2017

- Record keeping
- Reporting and documenting casework decisions
- Working with adults to support the child
- Assessing a child's development
- Writing affidavits
- Providing birth families permanency information
- Creating detailed genograms
- Locating family members of children in care
- Working and engaging with Aboriginal children, families, agencies and communities
- Working and engaging with families affected by trauma
- Assessing safety and risk concerns
- Assessing child wellbeing
- Adoption casework resources

Respondents were asked to extend the list if they could not see their needs listed above. Thirty-three respondents (or **25%** of the sample) gave open-ended answers to this question.

Table B1 provides an overview of the open text responses received. Eight major themes were revealed: role clarity and accountability (**8** mentions); carer information and support (**8** mentions); guardian and adoption casework practices and resources (**6** mentions); family preservation and restoration (**5** mentions); other needs (**5** mentions); working with children and families affected by trauma (**3** mentions); contact (**2** mentions) and outcomes (**2** mentions). Two respondents indicated that they had no additional comments.

For the most part these themes were already contained in the explicit list of critical needs, and strongly reflected the focus group findings, indicating that respondents have taken the opportunity to clarify and enlarge on their opinions they expressed in their responses to the closed questions. Three themes were most prominent in terms of occurrence: the need for clear role expectations and lines of accountability and responsibility; the need to support and skill up carers including potential adoptive parents and guardians, emergency placement and long-term foster carers; and building capacity to work with birth families both for contact and restoration.

© ACWA/CCWT 2017

Table B1: Are there any other areas not listed above that you consider important in supporting your permanency practice?

Theme	Categories	Occurrence (Number)	Verbatim Example/s
Role clarity and accountability	Impact on contractual obligations	8	*"Accountability of service delivery packages obtained – this has not been clearly outlined"*
	Clarity of expectations		*"Role clarity/differentiation between FACS and NGO. Confirmation of case plan goals at outset/intake including contractual obligations e.g. financial commitments. Developments that changes the intended case plan objective and how that impacts case management and contractual obligations."*
			"Working with the Permanency Coordinators"
	Integration of elements		*"Understanding of who is driving and making the decisions about permanency plans. Who drives the court proceedings, the integration of all elements?"*
	Consistency		*"Access to local agency information e.g. to be able to make appropriate referrals etc. Also how to work more effectively with FACS as each region tends to take a different approach to policy implementation and networking."*
	Need for reciprocal understanding		*"It is very important for FACS caseworkers to understand and practice those principles so that NGOs can work effectively in positive partnerships to support children and youth in OOHC and also their families."*
	Lack of accurate information on the ground		*"… The apparent gap seems to be within the knowledge of many NGO OOHC providers about what their role is and what the reforms mean. Their lack of accurate information leads to worryingly inaccurate information being provided to current carers*
	Pace of change		

Theme	Categories	Occurrence (Number)	Verbatim Example/s
	management process		*as well as prospective guardians/adopters. Perhaps an area to be addressed by contract managers who oversee the local contracts with individual NGOs across the districts. The new program is already behind schedule as the procurement process re appointing a panel of assessors has yet to be concluded, hence it is unlikely that real traction will occur before early 2018."*
			"Apart from what I have read or heard my agency has never discussed this with me."
	Assessment		*"Joint assessments (between FACS and Agencies) so that the children and YP who require the subsidies are assessed as such."*
Carer information and support	Supporting carers and carer applicants	8	*"Supporting carer applicants for Guardianship and Adoption Orders to prepare for independent care and access to mainstream supports"*
			"Provide more support to carers and potential adoptive parents or guardians"
			"Better respite and support services for foster carers"
	Informing carers about permanency and openness		*"Informing carers of the importance of family and other network connection for the child/children in care"*
			"Working with carers in understanding permanency and engaging them in working with parents."
	Carer skills		*"Skilling up carers for emergency care placements."*
	Building the pool of carers		*"Training, recruiting and assessing foster carers, who can provide supported placements for Children and Young People who display trauma."*

Theme	Categories	Occurrence (Number)	Verbatim Example/s
Guardian and adoption casework practices and resources	Guardianship practices & resources Post-restoration support Assessing carer capacity Adoption practices & resources	6	*"Guardianship resources and what post restoration support will look like."* *"Guardianship casework resources. Understanding the best permanency option moving forward for foster carers and relative carers"* "*Assessing carers capacity for Guardianship and Adoption. Casework practices in Guardianship and Adoption (including legal paperwork)"*
Family preservation and restoration	Family work Building capacity for restoration Locating family members Home visits	5	*"Family work with birth families"* *"Family preservation skills development. Family Group Conferencing."* *"Self-regulation, relationship communication, behaviour management and attachment programs for non custodial parents to improve capacity for restoration and permanence planning."* *"Family finding"* *"I believe that 2 caseworkers (1 very experienced) are needed at times during home visits or discussions (not all the time) to be present when supporting restoration and making decisions as other factors can make a huge difference such as culture and just general observations that others might miss or not recognise.*
Other needs	Legal Leaving care Mandating training	5	*"Court processes [and] associated Act"* *"Supporting young people through the leaving care process (15-18) to maximise YP outcomes"* *"Compulsory staff training"*

© ACWA/CCWT 2017

Theme	Categories	Occurrence (Number)	Verbatim Example/s
	Accommodation Siblings		*"More funding for Supported Accommodation Services that that will accept and support families in crisis."* *"Residences and Group Homes that will make a commitment to supporting young people to remain with their siblings."*
Working with children and families affected by trauma	Assessment Disability Culture	3	*"Tracking child wellbeing"* *"Accessing NDIS"* *"Working with children, families and communities from CALD backgrounds; working with children with complex trauma needs and/or disabilities"*
Contact	Managing the impact of contact	2	*"Impact of Contact on Child/ren who are not restored e.g. the ongoing trauma impact of mandated Contact. Contact should be at a pace that is conducive to a child's best interest if the child is not being restored taking into consideration the child's developmental needs and emotional needs."* *"Birth family contact"*
Outcomes	Outcomes based contracting Measurement	2	*"Getting rid of 'perverse financial disincentives' i.e. the more stabilised and successful the behaviours the more funding is reduced in [SIPs] placements"* *"Measuring outcomes"*

Source: Improving permanency outcomes: What are your support needs? (Survey, 2017)

B2. Other potential solutions

Survey respondents were asked to rank the priority of the critical needs that had been identified in the focus group findings, where these were relevant to areas they believed their own agency needed to strengthen. Respondents were then asked: "*Are there any other solutions not mentioned above, that you think would address the permanency practice gaps? Please list.*"

Eighteen respondents (**13.7**% of the sample) listed other potential priorities and/or solutions, which are summarised by major theme and number of occurrences in **Table B2** below. One respondent indicated they had no further comments.

Four major themes were revealed in the data exploration: Collaboration and information exchange (**7** mentions); supporting carers (**5** mentions); other potential solutions (**4** mentions) and concerns about funding levels (**2** mentions). These themes were largely complementary to views expressed in the closed question survey data.

Table B2: Are there any other solutions not mentioned above, that you think would address the permanency practice gaps?

Theme	Categories	Occurrence (Number)	Verbatim Example/s
Collaboration and information exchange	Information sharing Role clarity Up-to-date and consistent information	7	*"Exchange of information and sharing without restrictions between NGO & FACS.* *"Agreement on change of circumstances that alters case plan goals."* *"How post restoration would work within the NGO sector?"* *"As long as all documents regarding roles are kept current"* *"Templates that NGOs can use that are FACS approved (14 day placement meeting, guardianship, adoption) - maybe created by FACS and distributed to NGOs who can insert their logo."*

Theme	Categories	Occurrence (Number)	Verbatim Example/s
	Consistent assessment tools Congruence		*"Access to tools that are consistent throughout the state, safety assessment, risk assessment, risk reassessment etc."* *"Adopt a trauma informed approach as the organisational culture (i.e. Sanctuary model) across the interagency network including within the collaboration between government and non-government organization to provide a more supportive rather than competitive working environment, which conducive to minimise burn-out and to maximise CYPs positive outcomes."*
Supporting carers	Addressing carer concerns about contact post-orders Risk assessment and mentoring Streamlining processes	5	*"How to address concerns by agency/foster carers re facilitating birth family contact post-guardianship/adoption - what options exist? Often these are valid concerns and the main area that hinders progression to permanency for these matters. It is understood that other family/mutual contacts could facilitate but sometimes this option is not available."* *"[Helping] carers to support the change and allowing the child to be heard"* *"FACS and NGO to conduct risk assessment and mentoring for Carers who facilitate Contacts when Guardianship/Adoption occurs."* *"Make the process for guardianship adoption quicker, i.e. I could fill in paperwork on the questions quick compared to face to face over months."*
Other potential solutions	Cultural responsive practice Legal Housing	4	*"Access to consultation on cultural responsive training - working with Aboriginal children and children from CALD"* *"FACS needs to ensure that NGOs' input is very clear in court documents as this is still a current issue."* *"Independent supported housing solutions for suitable young people that return to family is not an option."*

Theme	Categories	Occurrence (Number)	Verbatim Example/s
	Research		*"Strategic focus on programs that support young people suitable for a move towards independence. Programs to include collaborative cooperation with Housing and supported by applicable training."* *"Research in the various areas of the PSP model."*
Concerns about funding levels		2	*"Funding and resources for creating and supporting placements, be it Kinship, Foster care, Restoration…or other innovative ones - it might not be politically expedient or affordable to support group homes and residential models either but Juvenile Justice, Drug addiction and Overdose, Suicide, Jails and Mental Health Problems are unacceptable outcomes for not providing decent minimum levels of care for children and young people who require it....What about funding some research and acting on it. Or perhaps a better compensation mechanism for children and young people 'damaged' due to state inaction is required to encourage the state take responsibility before or after the fact."* *"FACS staff being able to make decisions based on the needs of the child without being overridden for budgetary reasons."*

Source: Improving permanency outcomes: What are your support needs? (Survey, 2017)

B3. Other comments

Respondents were finally asked: "*Do you have any other comments you would like to share about the Permanency Support Program or your permanency needs, that were not included in this survey?*" Thirty-eight respondents (**28.8%** of the sample) expressed additional comments. Of these five respondents explicitly indicated they had no further comments.

Respondents tended to provide further context for their views expressed in the closed questions, or reinforce the explicit proposed solutions that had emerged from the focus group findings. A dominant theme was concerns about uncertainty, risks and/or unintended consequences of the model and the reform implementation process (**17** mentions). Four other themes emerged from the data exploration: other potential solutions (**7** mentions); supporting carers (**6** mentions); training and recruitment (**3** mentions) and anticipated benefits (**2** mentions).

Table B3: Do you have any other comments you would like to share about the Permanency Support Program or your permanency needs, that were not included in this survey?

Theme	Categories	Occurrence (Number)	Verbatim Example/s
Concerns about uncertainty, risks and/or unintended consequences	Information uncertainty	17	*"I think the funding around the new permanency support program has been challenging. Quarter 2 funding was received with no explanation as to what the funds were for. The new CAT tool has not been released yet. None of the reporting documents have been released yet."* *"I think the overall aims of the Permanency Support Program have been well articulated and explained by the Department. My concern is the poor level of understanding in how to operationalise the reforms. Additionally, the misunderstanding between CS Head Office and CS Districts is quite concerning in how new contracts should be implemented. There is a high level of uncertainty across financial reporting, outcome reporting, exceptions support/placements,*

Theme	Categories	Occurrence (Number)	Verbatim Example/s
			abatements." *"There is so much being made up on the fly by FACS it is hard to be constructively informed."* *"FACS need to be clear on the processes before they are introduced. The whole concept needs to be shelved until it is devised and practiced somewhere."*
	Need for clarity and consistency		*"There is a lack of clarity in regards to the role that NGOs will play in the delivery of family preservation work. There is lack of clarity on various business rules regarding PSP."* *"There needs to be consistency of attitude and support across CFDU. The current system and the knowledge of support across regions appears disjointed. Outcomes are both jeopardised and inconsistent when guidance, processes and systems are fragmented."*
	Communication blockages		*"As a practitioner/observer of FACS policy implementation it would seem that our statutory body is a little behind the '8 ball' in that implementation has already occurred and we are yet to hear of the permanency support coordinator roles being rolled out and exactly how this will work in partnership with NGOs. There also seems to be a narrow direction in terms of case plan goals from what we are seeing currently. Communication between regional FACS offices and NGOs absolutely has to change if this is going to work e.g. simple, timely responses from caseworkers and managers to support NGO casework."*
	Need for stronger collaboration		*"We would benefit from continuing collaborating with FACS moving forward,*

Theme	Categories	Occurrence (Number)	Verbatim Example/s
			while this has been done to some extent in the past we would benefit from shared information and training and opportunities to work together (e.g. mentoring with writing legal documents such as affidavits and section 82 report)."
			"Stronger collaboration across Districts and with peaks to minimise duplication...esp. re metropolitan districts"
	Acknowledging the amount of time required to do the requisite work		*"I believe that the changes to permanency planning for children in OOHC are wonderful and the right direction to move. However to do this work well it is very time consuming and I worry about case loads and risk of not doing this work well due to time constraints."*
	Fragmentation		*"PSP is more focused on the individual needs of the child and family, but do the services exist within the community to support this? We have been working with several children going home, often with adolescents who have sped up the process by self-placing. We have been unable to access intensive family supports to support these situations with the waiting list being long. Also we have an adolescent with an IFC ranking and his behavioural challenges are more than foster carers can manage. Where are these therapeutic residential units? They sound great but where are they and what are there waiting lists like? We need the industry services to support the needs of these children"*
	Mandatory training needed about adoption		*I think that case managers are the ones that are "breaking the bad news" to parents regarding their children who are going to be in foster care adoption. These conversations are usually very scaring for birth families and often end with the birth*

Theme	Categories	Occurrence (Number)	Verbatim Example/s
			family getting angry at the case worker (who they may have had a good relationship with before). Permanency needs to be talked about with understanding of what it means for each family and each caseworker team leader and manager needs to understand what this means for everyone and have a better understanding of what adoption means. I think ALL agencies need better understanding of what adoption means and how this would look like for permanency for the child. I think that mandatory training for all agencies around permanency is needed, not just the agencies that provide adoption from foster care.
	ITC		*"Concern that the ITC will not meet the needs of those Young People with extreme needs as grouping young people with problems together is intrinsically problematic and merely improving the therapeutic environment around this group may not necessarily stabilise this dynamic. The need for a one on one alternative may still be required however I acknowledge that placing people in motels is not suitable. Intensive therapeutic foster placement may be an alternative. The model does not adequately focus on young people who may be suitable for moving towards independence let alone articulate the programs that may support this."* *"Concern about concentrating the most high needs clients in Intensive therapeutic care: and the potential management issues associated with groups of such young people living together, and; the lack of a realistic option to move them onto. The lack of discussion to address the critical need for more intensively supported post*

Theme	Categories	Occurrence (Number)	Verbatim Example/s
			care options particularly for the group mentioned above."
	Restoration		*"Restoration is not necessarily a permanency option and is often not a safety and wellbeing option. The goals of the PSP are going to put children at risks and agencies will be held responsible."*
			"For restoration, aside from funding to support the placement back with family for 6 months, is there any provision to continue supports for child, e.g. ongoing counselling…?"
	Impacts on existing carers		*"My foster children are a permanent part of my family, I am not in a financial position to provide the needs they have. Getting the re-cat I have applied for is becoming a joke. I have a child with FASD, ASD SPD and ADHD on general payments. No way am I taking PR and not getting any further assistance. How can we trust we won't be left financial care of the kids if the rules change again? Not in my child's best interest to not be able to access therapy" [Foster Carer respondent]*
			"Impact on existing Carers and children with long term orders."
Other potential solutions	Supported options	7	*Supported options for older children and young people to maintain permanency*
	Locating family members		*"I believe that Family Finding needs to have a stronger voice within this permanency discussion. Creating strong networks around our C/YP will assist in creating a longer standing family environment that will last their lifetime."*
	Working with birth families		*"I think also this information about permanency principles should be shared with biological parents / families for all the*

Theme	Categories	Occurrence (Number)	Verbatim Example/s
			children who are currently in Out of home care. This could be shared via emails or letters. At the present state many birth families are not engaging positively because of the way they are treated and judged by some caseworkers and also because of the lack of communication between them and FACS and Legal Aid."
	Family preservation		*"More support for parents on early intervention and first option in keeping the child at home or with family members."*
	Making outcomes sustainable		*"Needs to look at the ongoing issues once permanency is achieved whether it be in the family home or other setting, what is required to ensure it is maintained over the longer period."*
	Reporting		*"Congruence in reporting mechanisms."*
Supporting carers	Education and providing information	6	*"I think a lot more work needs to be done on educating and informing current carers on their options and the options available for the children in their care."*
			"Specific information and training for foster carers
			"Make it understandable [for carers]"
			"I think that we need to consider how to support foster carers who want to be guardians but could not supervise contact."
	Financial assistance		*"Aside from ongoing allowance for foster carers who become guardians, what financial assistance is there for carers to support child's needs, for example, ongoing counselling?"*
	Streamlining processes		*"Repeating CRC and WWCC and repeating questions same as for foster care and adoption and guardianship is a waste of*

Theme	Categories	Occurrence (Number)	Verbatim Example/s
			resources and time"
Training and recruitment		3	*"Specific training would be great for all staff across the different facets of the PSP."* *"Specific staff need to be recruited for these roles in NGOs. Staff that have experience in the area and the qualification."* *"Training either online, face to face"*
Anticipated benefits		2	*"I think permanency support program will benefit children in care and provide more support to Rel/Kin carers.'"* *"If the new program is effective, this should assist client throughput where appropriate permanent placements can be achieved, hence creating some capacity within the existing provisions of foster care and residential care."*

Source: Improving permanency outcomes: What are your support needs? (Survey, 2017)