MEDIA RELEASE

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Peak Body's Response to Announcement of Review and ACYP's Report

CEO of the Association for Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA), Maree Walk said the not-for-profit sector welcomed Minister Washington's announcement of a six-month review into Out of Home Care, including foster care, residential care, and high-cost emergency accommodation.

"We're very optimistic that the review will be a catalyst for a revitalisation of Out of Home Care. It's an inherently complex landscape, and we're sometimes dealing with heartbreaking issues, as the Advocate for Children and Young People has just illustrated," said Ms Walk.

"We think the review will be the opportunity to methodically analyse these challenges and provide a roadmap for the entire sector in partnership with the Department of Communities and Justice."

Ms Walk said the testimonies of children in Alternative Care Arrangements (ACAs), reported in the media in response to the Advocate for Children and Young People's report were very distressing.

"We agree with the Minister: it's heartbreaking. ACWA's members are determined to get children out of ACAs as quickly as possible. This issue is our top priority," said Ms Walk.

"ACAs are the absolute last resort option for not-for-profits. They are exceptional cases, generally where placements with foster or kin carers have been strained beyond repair. These are vulnerable, blameless children, often dealing with trauma, mental health issues and in desperate need of loving care.

"All these pressures can culminate in extreme behaviours, that kin or foster carers find impossible to manage and can no longer sustain the placement. And finding another placement becomes even harder. It is heart-breaking; there's no better way to describe it," said Ms Walk.

"While the children in ACAs represent a small proportion of the children in Out of Home Care (around 73 of 14,000 children) we urgently need to find ways of securing long-term, stable solutions for these vulnerable children," said Ms Walk.

Ms Walk said ACWA, and her members were currently working with senior members of the Department for Communities and Justice. "Together, we're working through issues like ACAs, and developing sustainable plans to address them."

Reducing children in ACAs and other forms of emergency accommodation is one of numerous issues not-for-profit children's welfare agencies have been working on closely with the Department of Communities and Justice and the Minister's office.

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02 9281 8822 acwa@acwa.asn.au www.acwa.asn.au

Level 9, The Chelsea, 93/110 Sussex Street Sydney NSW 2000

Patron: Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC Governor of New South Wales

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“The review will help the whole sector resolve issues like children in ACAs, while also working through some of the upstream systemic pressures Out of Home Care has been confronting,” said Ms Walk.

Ms Walk said some of the strain facing the Out of Home Care system was the result of long-term demographic and economic shifts leaving a shortage of foster carers. Cost-of-living increases, particularly for housing has had a significant impact on potential new carers with the cost of an additional bedroom adding significantly to mortgage or rental payments for both homes and units.[1]

Increases in dual income families,[2] and the average age of retirement,[3] as well as the decline in charitable activities across the nation, have also contributed to a declining pool of carers.

“If we can address some of these upstream issues, our hope is that far fewer children in care will ever need emergency care options,” said Ms Walk.''

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For further enquiries or comment, please contact:

Maree Walk
CEO, Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies
ceo@acwa.asn.au
0407 453 548

About the Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies (ACWA)

The Association of Children's Welfare Agencies is the NSW peak body representing non-government organisations that provide services to vulnerable children, young people and their families.

[1] SMH March 2024 & SMH January 2024
[2] Crickey Jan 2024
[3] ABS Aug 2023