

Submission for Children and Community Services Amendment Bill 2019

Children and Community Services Amendment Bill 2019 Feedback

Wanslea welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Children and Community Services Amendment Bill 2019.

Context

We support the right of children and young people to live safely and securely within their family, and where this is not possible, that these rights will be protected by our community wherever they may live. Children and young people are entitled to feel culturally safe, irrespective of their cultural background or ethnicity.

It is acknowledged that the legislation must be supported by policies and procedures that are enablers to good practice, and so should be practical and based on principles of substantive equality.

Families are the basis of our society and where they are unable to care for their children, the State has a responsibility to ensure the best possible care is provided. Wanslea has provided services for children in out of home care for its entire existence (founded in 1943) and currently works with families, children and young people in Perth, the Wheatbelt, Great Southern and Bindjareb regions in prevention and support programs. We offer foster care, early intervention for families experiencing vulnerability, support for family carers (primarily grandparents), support for grandparent headed families and leaving care programs for young people who are leaving or have left the care of the State.

The legislation needs to ensure that it provides the basis for consistency, respect and child focussed practices to support families and minimise the number of children coming into care.

Wanslea recommends the following be included:

Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making (AFLDM) similar to models practised in the Northern Territory and Queensland. It should be facilitated by trained, independent people to minimise the power imbalances inherent in these processes. Models such as this work for people of all cultures and can be used across all interactions with families where children are at risk of being taken into care.

Queensland has trialled three models of AFLDM that have been evaluated by SNAICC and these can be considered as options for Western Australia.

Principles of restorative justice should underpin all work in this area.

Early intervention that is family focussed is vital to keeping children safe and at home. Much of earlier work undertaken in this area has been dismantled due to the crisis approach used by the Department of Communities and the lack of support of community based organisations to work in this area. The current suite of services is underfunded to meet demand, not able to intervene early enough in the family and insufficient in number and spread.

Timely planning for children in care such that Care Plans are in place within ten days of placement

Focus on reunification early in the child's placement with reunification services appropriately funded to undertake the work

Adherence to the full application of the **Aboriginal Child Placement Principles**

Acknowledgement that what is **viable** in Perth may not be appropriate in remote parts of the State due to distance, entrenched dysfunction, poverty

Children and Community Services Amendment Bill 2019 Feedback

This is an opportunity for the State to commit to the principle of fully supporting young people leaving care to **raise the Leaving Care age** to twenty one years (21) with financial, housing, education and health supports. This is a national issue and supported by most jurisdictions. It appears that financial implications are a barrier that denies the evidence that greater support at this stage will save money in the longer term

Children who are in the **care of grandparents** without a formal court order also need to be recognised as citizens in their own right with carers receiving support including financial payments commensurate with that provided to foster carers

For further informaton please contact Tricia Murray on

support@wanlsea.asn.au