

20. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN VOLUNTARY OUT-OF-HOME CARE (VOOHC)

Draft April 2012

POLICY

Definition

Voluntary out-of-home care (VOOHC) refers to those situations where a parent of a child or young person makes a voluntary arrangement with an appropriate organisation for the placement of their child or young person in out-of-home care.

A child or young person (person under the age of 18) is in VOOHC when:

- he or she stays at a place other than his/her usual home for one or more nights;
- he or she is in the care and control of a person other than his/her parent (ie: the person with parental responsibility for the child or young person); and
- his/her **parent** has entered into an arrangement with an **organisation** to provide or arrange that care (a voluntary arrangement).

When does an organisation provide VOOHC?

A VOOHC agency **provides** VOOHC where it is responsible for the care of a child or young person, or where it arranges for an individual (i.e. not an organisation such as a company or family partnership) to provide that care. This involves any overnight stays in our house or other accommodation in the community.

When does an organisation arrange VOOHC?

An organisation arranges VOOHC when it organises for another organisation (sub-contracting or brokering out) or family partnership to provide care for a child or young person on its behalf, under a voluntary arrangement between the organisation and the parent of the child or young person. This includes voluntary host-family arrangements where the care is in the host family's home and the host family is not a family member.

When we arrange and/or provide VOOHC Interchange must:

- manage the intake and assessment of children and young people entering VOOHC,
- work cooperatively with parents (i.e. **those with parental responsibility for the child or young person**) and other organisations in supporting the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people in VOOHC
- plan and review the care of children and young people in VOOHC
- ensure that a designated agency or the NSW Children's Guardian ("the Children's Guardian") provides or supervises the care of children and young people who have been in VOOHC for more than a total of 90 days in a 12 month period ; and
- report to the Children's Guardian if :
 - (a) a child or young person has been in VOOHC for more than a total of 90 days in a 12 month period and does not have their care provided or supervised by a designated agency or the Children's Guardian; **or**
 - (b) a child or young person has been in VOOHC for more than a total of 180 days in a 12 month period and does not have a case plan that meets their needs.
- manage a child or young person leaving VOOHC;
- coordinate decision-making and service delivery and share information with other organisations and make child protection reports where a child or young person is at risk of significant harm.

Principles to be observed

- ✓ A family-centred approach must be taken to VOOHC, but the safety, welfare and wellbeing of the child or young person is paramount (PP3#11)

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- ✓ Children and young people and their parents must be able to make informed choices about services and participate in decision-making (PP3#2)
- ✓ VOOHC agencies and funding bodies must work collaboratively in coordinating decision-making and service delivery for children and young people (PP3#3)
- ✓ Respite is a critical service for supporting the relationship between a child or young person and their family
- ✓ Children and young people should not be placed in VOOHC if appropriate services can be provided to enable them to remain with their families - *Short-term occasional respite is recognised as a service that promotes children and young people remaining with their families*
- ✓ VOOHC services must be age-appropriate (PP3#6)
- ✓ VOOHC agencies must support a child or young person maintain connections with their family and community (PP3#11)
- ✓ VOOHC agencies must be respectful of any cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds (PP3#4)
- ✓ Children and young people and their parents must have access to fair and equitable procedures for dealing with complaints and disputes concerning VOOHC services (PP3#15)

Obligations

- All families accessing respite support from Interchange Shoalhaven to be informed at initial assessment of the nature of VOOHC legislation and our obligations to report.
- All incidents of out-of-home overnight care must be registered on the VOOHC web based registration system. "New Placement Notifications" must be recorded within 5 working days of the placement start date. They cannot be recorded in advance and you cannot record the exit date until the child has left the placement.
- As of October 2010 we will be obliged to monitor all incidents of VOOHC. Once a child has received more than 90 overnight stays in any one year period, then all of their care must be managed by a designated agency (which we are NOT)
- All agencies providing VOOHC (even if the care is brokered by another agency) must register and report the care they provide. We cannot broker any overnight care to an organisation that is not registered with the Children's Guardian.
- Care as part of a social camp or holiday that is not part of a respite plan is **probably** outside of the Act and doesn't have to be recorded.
- Care by a family member is **outside** the Act but care by a friend organised through us is included and should be registered
- Once details of a placement is submitted they cannot be changes electronically (if we have entered a wrong date or details we will need to ring VOOHC and have it changed manually)

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1. Information on VOOHC, including pamphlet is included in the Consumer Information package which is made available to and discussed with families at time of initial assessment.

Procedures for recording and reporting care

2. All out-of-home overnight care for a child or young person needs to be recorded by the coordinators organizing the care
 - 1) VOOHC spreadsheet established in Coordinators folder –name, DOB, date care due to commence and date care due to finish and the opportunity to note date of when entries are made to the website.
 - 2) Volunteers informed that all care must be registered with the office before or (at worst) during care. This to be recorded on a running file (like the brokerage file) and details of VOOHC be transferred onto VOOHC spreadsheet.
 - 3) Coordinators will be responsible for registering details of any VOOHC care onto the VOOHC spreadsheet as soon as care arrangements have been confirmed.
3. Assistant Coordinator is the nominated VOOHC monitor who will
 - i. Check that care due to start within 5 days is confirmed and register it on the website
 - ii. Check that care due to finish within 5 days is confirmed and register it on the website
 - iii. That care that has changed after it has been registered be recorded via an e-mail to the website controller (we can't make changes on the website that have already been registered)

Procedures for intake/assessment/care plans/review/coordination/ with other agencies/ exiting/mandatory reporting

4. as per our existing PP#3 procedures

Procedures for supervising care beyond 90 days in a 12 month period

The VOOHC monitor is responsible for monitoring placement histories and alerting the Manager if an individual is approaching 90 days in a 12 month period;

5. If a child or young person has been in VOOHC for more than a total of 90 days in a 12 month period Interchange should ensure that the care is supervised by a designated agency or the Children's Guardian (eg DADHC);
6. Report to the Children's Guardian if :
 - (a) a child or young person has been in VOOHC for more than a total of 90 days in a 12 month period and does not have their care provided or supervised by a designated agency or the Children's Guardian; **or**
 - (b) a child or young person has been in VOOHC for more than a total of 180 days in a 12 month period and does not have a case plan that meets their needs.