Standards Monitoring
Information
For Placement Service Providers

January 2010

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Preface

A number of initiatives commenced in 2006 to enhance the ability of services providers across the sector to provide the highest quality services to children and young people.

In April 2006 the Department for Child Protection (the Department) commenced a project to develop a set of standards applicable to its protection and care services. Concurrent with the development of standards for the Department's protection and care services a partnership between the Department and out of home care sector was established to revise the Out of Home Care Placement Services: principles and minimum service standards 1997, WA.

As the work of the respective groups progressed, it became evident that the needs of the Department and the sector would be best met through the development of one set of standards applicable to all children in the care of the CEO irrespective of who is providing their out-of-home care arrangement. The result is the Better Care Better Services Standards that apply to all children in the care of the CEO supported by the Department or funded services with the exception of the Youth Supported Accommodation Assistance program services where specific standards already apply.

At their respective meetings in October 2007, the Reference Group comprising representatives from the sector and the Corporate Executive of the Department endorsed these Standards and commenced working to promote their implementation across the sector.

The nine Standards have a primary focus on ensuring outcomes for children, young people, their families and carers that are consistent with the Objects and Principles of the Children and Community Services Act 2004. Standards 1 and 2 apply exclusively to the protection and safety functions of the Department for Child Protection. The Standards are consistent with the principle that the best interests of the child are paramount in any activity undertaken by the Department and its funded service providers. The emphasis within the sector is on using the Standards to encourage continuous improvement of services.

The Role of Standards in a Broader Quality Assurance Context

The sector is committed to improving the quality of services available to children, young people, their families and carers. Given this commitment, the sector sees the role of the Standards as:

- empowering children, young people, their families and carers by clearly defining what standards they should expect when accessing protection and care services;
- providing a basis for service providers to improve service quality based on an objective assessment of their practice to identify opportunities for service improvement;
- providing a means of satisfying government accountability requirements; and
• assisting staff by defining the expected standards of service provision relating to protection and care services.

The Standards monitoring process represents only one element of an effective quality assurance system that protects the rights and quality of life of children, young people, families and carers and drives continuing improvement towards excellence in service delivery.

A comprehensive quality framework provides internal and external ways of assessing all aspects of service delivery and ensuring ongoing improvements within and across services. The Department and service providers have a range of strategies in place to improve service quality.

**Standards Monitoring Visit**

The purpose of the monitoring visit is to assess whether the services provided by the Department and funded organisations are meeting the Standards and where evident identify excellence in service provision and opportunities for service improvement.

It provides the opportunity for monitors external to the service to:

- hear the views of children and young people;
- speak with families;
- speak with carers;
- speak with advocates;
- meet with staff;
- examine documentation about the services provided to children, young people and their families;
- examine documentation about the policies and procedures of the service; and
- where appropriate, observe the service in operation.

An essential component of the monitoring visit is to obtain feedback from children, young people, their families and carers with respect to the protection and care services they have received from the service provider.

**Steps in the Monitoring Process**

1. **Notification of the Service**

The Standards Monitoring Unit notifies the service that a comprehensive or abridged monitoring visit has been scheduled. The date for the monitoring visit will be confirmed between the monitors and service manager. The service will
nominate a contact person to coordinate the monitoring visit, complete the “Service Profile” and be the primary point of contact for the monitors.

Departmental District Offices are assessed against all nine Standards while monitoring of placement services determines compliance with Standards 3 to 9. Monitoring may take up to 12 weeks to complete. On occasion, an abridged monitoring visit may be undertaken and can address a fewer number of Standards or a reduced number of supporting standards within each Standard.

If during a monitoring visit, the monitor identifies a significant issue not related to the Standards being assessed, the matter will be referred to the service management.

2. Preliminary On-Site Meeting

One week prior to the monitoring visit, a preliminary on-site meeting will be held and provides an opportunity for:

- the monitors to explain the process to staff;
- the monitors to provide information about the Better Care Better Services Standards;
- the monitors to gain a greater understanding of the operations of the service; and
- participants to ask monitors questions about the process.

3. The Monitoring Visit

The office visiting component of the monitoring assignment usually takes place over a period up to four days. The visit involves the monitors spending time at the service talking to staff and management. The monitors also examine documentation maintained by the service including policies, procedures, individuals’ files and organisational records.

In addition, the monitors will contact families and carers either in person or by telephone. Children and young people in the care of the CEO aged eight years or older, are invited to talk with the monitor or to complete a questionnaire facilitated by their carer. This may be at the child’s home or at a venue negotiated between the young person, carer and the monitor.

If during the monitoring visit, a child, young person, their family, carer or any significant stakeholder raises a previously undisclosed allegation of abuse or neglect, the information shall be immediately forwarded to the service manager and the relevant District Director of the Department for Child Protection.
4. Consultations With Other Interested Stakeholders

The monitors may also liaise with other interested stakeholders including support workers, advocates and staff of other relevant services, to obtain their perceptions of the services being monitored.

5. The Draft Report

The draft report provides an opportunity for monitors to correct any errors of fact and for the service as well as the Department's Accommodation and Care Services and the Non Government Funding Unit to provide additional relevant information about special conditions or circumstances before the report is finalised.

The draft report is forwarded to a contact person nominated by the service provider.

5.1 What is Included in the Draft Report?

The draft report provides an assessment of how a service is meeting the Standards. The report takes into account the views of children, young people, their families, carers, staff and interested others about the service; identifies areas where opportunities for improvement exist; and records the monitors' observations and examination of the service’s policies and procedures. If a service has been monitored previously, the report will also include a synopsis of how the service utilised the report findings; and the service's response to the previously identified required actions and opportunities for service improvement.

In some situations, the monitors may identify required actions. For a service being monitored for the first time, required actions focus on the minimum satisfactory level of service and refer to action necessary to address matters that have serious implications for the safety, wellbeing and dignity of children, young people, their families and carers. If a service has previously been monitored, required actions will focus the minimum satisfactory level of service as prescribed by the Children and Community Services Act 2004 and may cover, but are not limited to, matters of duty of care, safety and compliance with legislation.

For each required action there will be a date specifying when the action must be completed. The service is responsible for notifying the Standards Monitoring Unit of completed action by close of business on the due date.

In the event that services are unable to complete a required action within the specified timeframe, a request to extend the implementation date needs to be forwarded to the Director General of the Department for Child Protection through the Standards Monitoring Unit. The request should be lodged at least one week prior to the compliance date specified in the monitoring report. An extension of time may be granted in exceptional circumstances.

The report may also contain opportunities for service improvement identified as part of the monitoring visit. These suggestions are often generated by children, young people, their families, carers, staff or the monitors' observations and have the potential to assist the service to better fulfil the Standards and improve the quality of service.
5.2 What the Draft Report Does Not Include

The purpose of the report is not to identify children, young people, families, carers or staff who are unhappy with the service. Consistent with this approach, any comments made by children, young people, families or staff included in the report are conveyed in a non-identifying manner.

The report does not comment on individual staff performance, rates of pay for staff or staffing levels. In addition the report does not comment on current unresolved complaints raised by children, young people, families, carers or staff.

6. Post Monitoring Meeting

A post monitoring meeting will be conducted when it is desired by the service or the monitors consider such a meeting is necessary. The draft report is discussed at the meeting.

Issues identified during the monitoring visit would generally have been already raised by the monitors with the service, children, young people, families and their carers. As a result, there should be no surprises for the service at the post monitoring meeting.

The objectives of the meeting are to:

- table the key findings;
- provide feedback about positive aspects of the service;
- enable the service to provide additional information;
- discuss the assessment and where there are required actions to negotiate realistic implementation dates; and
- discuss opportunities for service improvement.

The period leading up to the post monitoring meeting allows the service provider time to consider the draft report, to suggest corrections and offer additional information to the monitors, if relevant.

7. Final Report

The final report is produced by the monitors as soon as possible after the post monitoring meeting. It is then forwarded to the Corporate Executive of the Department for Child Protection for endorsement before being sent to the Service, the Department’s Accommodation and Care Services Unit and the Non Government Funding Unit.

The Standards Monitoring Unit will report on service provider achievements and progress to the Department’s Non Government Funding Contract Managers and Accommodation and Care Services Project Officers.
8. Appeal and Review

While the monitoring visit is designed to be a collaborative process between the service, children, young people, families, carers and monitor, situations may arise where the service or those involved may want to raise issues about aspects of the monitoring visit. Service providers, children, young people, families and carers may raise any concerns with the monitors or the Standards Monitoring Unit at any time during the visit.

If a service has a significant concern with the findings of the final report but does not want to appeal the findings, they may forward a letter to the Standards Monitoring Unit to be attached to the report. This letter will be forwarded to the Director General of the Department.

In circumstances where service providers strongly disagree with the findings of the report, an appeal and review panel can be convened to review the findings of the monitoring team. The panel will be convened by the Director General of the Department. In appointing panel members, the Director General will ensure that the people selected have knowledge of, and experience in, matters relevant to protection and care services, and have no conflict of interest in the matters to be reviewed.

A decision resulting from this review process will be forwarded to the Director General.

9. Monitoring Evaluation

On completion of the monitoring assignment the Standards Monitoring Unit will seek feedback from the service about the monitoring process and performance of the monitors. The feedback will be forwarded to the relevant monitors and also be used in the Unit’s continuous improvement process.
A Quick Guide to the Monitoring Visit

1. The service provider is notified that monitoring visit has been scheduled.

2. A preliminary on-site meeting is held.

3. The monitoring visit takes place, usually over one to four days.

4. Monitors may contact other interested stakeholders.

5. The monitors write a draft report that is checked for errors of fact.

6. A draft report is provided to the Service Manager for distribution at manager's discretion, the Department's Accommodation and Care Services Unit, and Non Government Funding Unit.

7. A post monitoring meeting may take place.

8. The final report is distributed to the Service, and discussed with the Department's Accommodation and Care Services Unit Project Officers and Non Government Funding Contract Managers.

9. Service providers have the opportunity to appeal the report findings.

10. Service providers provide formal feedback on the monitoring process and monitors' performance.