

Taskforce 1000

Bulletin three – September 2015

Taskforce 1000

Taskforce 1000 is a collaborative project between the Department of Health and Human Services and the Commission for Children and Young People.

The project seeks to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people and inform future planning by reviewing the current circumstances of the individual child to inform practice.

Overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care

In Victoria, the average placement rate for Aboriginal children in care in Victoria is 62.7¹ per thousand, which greatly exceeds the placement rate of 5.1 per thousand for non-Aboriginal children.

Progress on Taskforce 1000

Taskforce 1000 has been implemented in twelve of the 17 areas to date. The area panels have reviewed 800 of approximately 1000 Aboriginal children in out-of-home-care. The Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, Mr Andrew Jackomos has personally co-chaired each individual area panel with the relevant area director.

Taskforce has been implemented in 3 phases:

Phase 1 (Pilot) – 222 children (July–December 2014) across Inner Gippsland, Mallee, Western Melbourne and Southern Melbourne Areas.

Phase 2 – approximately 350 children (April–August 2015) across Inner Eastern and Outer Eastern Melbourne, Central Highlands, Outer Gippsland, Barwon and North Eastern Melbourne Areas.

Phase 3 – approximately 450 children (August–December 2015) across Bayside Peninsula, Goulburn, Western District, Melton Brimbank, Loddon, Hume Moreland and Ovens Murray Areas.

Themes

To date the area panels have revealed four main themes as contributing to Aboriginal children coming into out-of-home care:

- family violence
- parental substance misuse
- parental mental health issues
- neglect.

In addition, some emerging issues include:

- past or current imprisonment of one or both parents
- parental homelessness.

The area panels are revealing the majority of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care:

- are not connected to community and culture, or do not know their heritage particularly Tasmanian heritage
- have lost contact with their siblings
- lack cultural plans and cultural experiences.

The area panels have demonstrated children have better outcomes where Aboriginal community controlled organisations have positive relationships with child protection.

Panels have identified a number of areas to be addressed including the need to:

- provide counselling in a timely manner, for children suffering trauma or sexual abuse
- resolve cross border issues
- develop strategies to support carers of children with disabilities in out-of-home care
- improve the cultural competency and awareness of child protection practitioners
- develop a strategy to recruit Koori child protection practitioners and managers
- improve the involvement of Koori engagement support officers in schools
- improve the identification of potential Koori kin and kinship carers
- ensure carers receive caregiver allowances.

¹ Report on Government Services 2015, Table 15A.18

Area panels and action plans

Area panels are formed to review, in a de-identified manner, the circumstances of each Aboriginal child in out-of-home care. The area panels are co-chaired by the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People and the responsible area director and comprise senior representatives from relevant government departments, community service organisations and Aboriginal organisations, using a process of open enquiry.

The panels examine current practice and collaborate to address barriers that may impede outcomes for individual children and young people. Area panels provide advice and guidance to care teams, identify and respond to issues at an area level that impact on client outcomes.

As areas complete their area panels they each develop an area report and an **action plan** in collaboration with the key stakeholders comprising both community and government. The action plan identifies key priority actions for each area to improve the outcomes for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.

When the 17 area action plans are complete a statewide report will be written in early 2016. This report will identify the statewide themes identified through Taskforce 1000 for future action.

How action plans will be implemented

Funding was allocated in the 2015–16 Victorian State Budget to improve supports for vulnerable Aboriginal children and families.

This funding is being used to recruit eight specialist positions for 12 months to oversee the implementation of area action plans being formed in response to issues identified through Taskforce 1000. A representative from the Office of the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People will be a panel member on each division's interview panel.

Community Yarns

The Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People is also meeting with Aboriginal community and family members of children and young people in out-of-home care to directly hear their experiences.

Community Yarns have been held in each area that has hosted Taskforce 1000. If community members are unable to attend the sessions they can contact the Commission directly by email at taskforce1000@ccyp.vic.gov.au.

Taskforce 1000 contacts

For further information regarding Taskforce 1000 please contact Ms Shelley O'Connell, Taskforce 1000 Project Manager on (03) 9096 7252 or by email to shelley.o'connell@dhs.vic.gov.au.

For information about Community Yarns facilitated through the Commission for Children and Young People email taskforce1000@ccyp.vic.gov.au or phone Kylie Belling on (03) 8601 5273.