

To: Solicitor
For the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Issues Paper 4

SUBMISSION REGARDING PREVENTION OF SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN IN OUT OF HOME CARE

My Background:

My name is Lyn Cobb. I have an Arts Degree with a major in Psychology from UNSW and a Post Graduate Diploma from The Foundation for Child & Youth Studies. I have worked in both government and non government service providers in NSW in the following capacities:

-as a district officer and alternate care officer with the then Department of Youth and Community Services (now FaCS). In this capacity I worked with a number of children and young people in the care of the (then) Department;

-as a manager of family support services with close liaison with a foster care service within Centacare (now CatholicCare). I managed family support services in two locations (Leichhardt and Canterbury) working with vulnerable families. This position liaised with a respite foster care program also within Centacare;

-as a manager of foster care services with Wesley Mission. This work involved case management of children in care. Additionally the role included the recruitment and ongoing support for foster carers;

-as an Official Community Visitor (administered by the NSW Ombudsman) in the FaCS sector. OCV's monitor government and non-government services which provide residential care for children and young people;

-as a foster carer with the then NSW Dept of Community Services. In the role, I cared for several children on a short term basis and two children on a long term basis. I was also instrumental in commencing a foster care support group in my geographic area.

MY SUBMISSION:

I have been involved in the provision of services to children and young people over many years and would like to offer some suggestions to enhance the prevention of sexual abuse of children and young people in care.

STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER IMPLEMENTING FOR PREVENTION OF SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN IN OOHC

1. Children's Advocate

In my view advocacy support should be introduced for children in all forms of OOHC irrespective of their age. This must include support for any children who are the subject of adoption proceedings.

The advocate would need to be independent, not a case worker from either government or non-government agencies who may be delivering services to a child/young person in OOHC.

In my work particularly as a OCV, my role is to oversight service provision in relation to the OOHC Standards. It has become clear to me there is a need for advocacy support to address the rights of the child.

An advocacy system would need to be readily accessible for all children and therefore have an available, easily contactable and independent person available to discuss any issues important to individual children in relation to their care. Issues of privacy, confidentiality and strident working with children checks to be firmly in place.

I would also recommend that in the case of babies and very young children there should be a children's advocate to oversight placement in any form of OOHC.

2. Extension of Official Community Visitor Jurisdiction to Foster Care

At present in NSW the work of OCV's only relates to children and young people in residential care. In my view the OCV role should be immediately extended to all children in Foster Care.

3. The Need for the Appointment of Additional Official Community Visitors.

The current work of OCV's should be enhanced with the appointment of extra Community Visitors so that many more checks can be undertaken at the child or young persons place of residence. Such visits could then better assess whether children / young people are safe.

NB: Regarding this last point, I want to advise I have nothing to gain from the introduction of this strategy as my term as an OCV is at an end. I have almost completed two terms (a total of six years) and as per legislation, my appointment as an OCV will end in February 2014.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

I would be more than happy to answer any further questions.

Regards

Lyn Cobb



13 October 2013