

KINSHIP CARE SERVICES

SUMMARY INFORMATION

Barwon Sub Region

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Department of Human Services

The Department of Human Services (DHS) is responsible for funding a wide range of services to diverse client groups across Victoria. The Department's principal function is to ensure the delivery of a range of health, housing, and community services. The DHS mission statement is:

To enhance and protect the health and well being of all Victorians, emphasising vulnerable groups and those most in need.

Children, Youth and Families Division is a division of DHS. It is focussed on the health, safety and wellbeing of children, youth and families in Victoria.

The Child Protection, Placement and Family Services Branch of the Children Youth and Families Division supports three related activities:

- Child Protection Services which ensure the safety and well-being of children and adolescents at risk of harm, abuse or neglect
- Family Services including Child FIRST accessed integrated family services which assist vulnerable families to promote the wellbeing of their children
- Placement and Support services for those children and young people who are unable to live with their own families and/or who require specialist support to address the impact of previous neglect and/or abuse.

1.2 Kinship care

Kinship care is the care provided by relatives or a member of a child's social network when a child cannot live with their parents.

Statutory kinship placements occur when a Child Protection intervention has occurred and a decision has been made to place a child with relatives or a significant friend, and may also involve an order made by the Children's Court.

Private kinship care (sometimes called "informal" or "non-statutory" kinship care) is the term used in this brief for those arrangements where children are cared for by relatives without any Child Protection intervention.

Data projections prepared for the out of home care review indicate that by the end of 2010/11 there will be approximately 2,500 Victorian children in statutory kinship placements. Although there are no reliable estimates of the number of current private kinship care arrangements in Victoria, national ABS data related to grandparents caring for grandchildren indicate that there are probably about four times more children in private kinship care arrangements than in statutory kinship care.

1.3 Policy context

The policy context for kinship care services is provided by:

- the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (the Act)
- the Best Interests Case Practice Model which implements the Act's requirements to make the best interests of the child paramount
- the Looking After Children (LAC) approach which provides the practice framework for the actual provision of out of home care within the overall Best Interests Case Practice Model
- the registration standards for community services organisations providing family services and placement services which will also be applicable in future to kinship care services
- the Charter of Rights for Children in out of home care
- The Charter of Rights for Carers (when endorsed by C/wealth State governments)
- the new kinship care program model currently being progressively implemented in Victoria

1.4 Kinship services program development

In late 2006, the DHS Child Protection, Placement and Family Services Branch commenced a project to articulate a policy framework to develop future kinship care service responses. This project was guided by an advisory committee and extensive feedback was provided from DHS regional staff, community service organisation (CSO) based practitioners, kinship carers, children in kinship care and their advocates.

The 2008/09 budget provided some additional funding for kinship care enhancement. A new (mainstream) kinship care program model for Victoria was then developed to incorporate the feedback from the consultative process, consideration of some promising kinship care service models that were piloted concurrently with the project, the most recently available international research and the need to develop an integrated kinship care service response across Child Protection and CSOs consistent with the Best Interests Case Practice Model.

The development and implementation of the new kinship care model for Victoria has the following objectives:

- To more effectively harness the capacity of extended family networks to provide the best possible kinship care arrangements for children unable to live with their own parents.
 - To assist more kinship carers to provide ongoing normative age appropriate life experiences for the child with the minimum level of professional intervention from the formal service system, building on their informal supports and other available community resources.
 - To ensure that the kinship care placements arranged for the most vulnerable children as a result of child protection involvement are more effectively established, supported and monitored to ensure that they meet each child's ongoing safety, stability and developmental needs.
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1.5 The new kinship care program model

The new mainstream model integrates:

- informal and mainstream community components
- Child Protection provided or accessed components
- new kinship service components to be provided by funded community service organisations (CSOs)

with the underpinning practice component being:

- the engagement of the child's family and extended family network in all decision-making processes.

An Aboriginal kinship program model is also being concurrently developed with the assistance of Aboriginal Child and Family Service organisations which will be implemented alongside the mainstream kinship program model.

The key elements of the enhanced mainstream kinship service model are summarised in the table below:

Informal and mainstream community supports	CSO provided kinship service components	Child protection provided/accessed components
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Family meetings ii. Family care team iii. Extended family network resources iv. Generalist community services for children, youth and families (services most families use) v. Mainstream targeted services (services some families use) vi. Kinship carers groups 	Kinship information and advice service (including coordination/support for kinship carers groups) Kinship family service (brief, occasional and short term support) Kinship placement support (statutory clients only): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o placement establishment support (up to six months) o case contracted case managed transitional support o case contracted case managed long term support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> x. Best interests statutory decision-making and implementation processes xi. Assessment and monitoring of suitability of kinship placements xii. Carer payments xiii. Other DHS funded placement support eg referral to Take Two, some extraordinary client expenses, some extraordinary placement establishment and/or maintenance expenses
<p>Underpinning practice component:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> xiv. Engaging the child's family and extended family network in all decision-making processes. 		

The funding is for the delivery of the CSO provided (mainstream) kinship service components only (highlighted in yellow in the table above). However, to provide an effective service response, all the above kinship service components must be linked.

2. SUB-REGIONAL CATCHMENT

2.1 The funding is for the Barwon sub-region including:

City of Greater Geelong, Surf Coast Shire, Borough of Queenscliff, Colac/Otway, Corangamite.

3. SERVICE DESCRIPTION AND REQUIREMENTS

3.1 Service Objectives

The overall objectives for the CSO provided mainstream kinship care services are:

- To enhance and build on the available informal and formal family and community supports for children living in kinship family arrangements.
- To assist extended family networks to provide the best possible kinship care arrangements for children unable to live with their own parents with the minimum level of professional intervention from the formal service system.
- To assist with the establishment, monitoring and support of the kinship care placements arranged for the most vulnerable children as a result of child protection involvement to ensure that they meet each child's ongoing safety, stability and developmental needs.

3.2 Service Overview

One CSO per sub-regional catchment will deliver the following three DHS funded kinship care service activities as one integrated (mainstream) kinship care service:

- Kinship information and advice
 - Kinship family services
 - Kinship placement support.
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Activity	Objectives	Target Group	Service Description/Type of Support
Kinship Information & Advice Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide relevant information and advice regarding community resources to assist kinship carers and those involved in supporting them To facilitate and/or coordinate kinship carer groups to develop information sharing and mutual support; promote access to training/other resources Enhance informal/formal community supports by disseminating relevant information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children, young people (0-17) growing up in kinship families (private arrangements and statutory kinship placements) Kinship carers, extended family members, professionals, other members of child's support network Members of the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brief face to face contact and/or telephone information and advice Group work including coordination, facilitation, and support for kinship carer self-help groups and training / arranging training access Dissemination of community information, resources needed by kinship carers, including building links with statewide and other information services relevant to kinship care
Kinship Family Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide time limited assistance to enable kinship carers to provide best possible kinship care with minimal professional intervention from formal service system To minimise/prevent the need for any/further involvement by child protection. 	<p>Kinship families caring for a child/young person,(0-17) in one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A private kinship arrangement A permanent care arrangement that is a conversion from a previous statutory kinship care placement An ongoing statutory kinship care arrangement not currently receiving kinship placement support (although may have previously received this support). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of brief, occasional and short term family support when needed to enable self-managing kinship care arrangements manage changes in circumstances/emerging issues Facilitate family meetings to assist with decision-making processes Support provided as either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brief service response (average 10 hours per family per episode; up to 4 episodes per family per year) Short to medium term service response (average 40 hours per family per year)
Kinship Placement Support Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To assist with establishment, monitoring and support for kinship care placements arranged for the most vulnerable children as a result of child protection involvement To provide support during the first 6 months of a statutory placement to establish the placement on sound basis To assist kinship carers and extended family networks to become self-managing with minimal need for ongoing professional involvement as soon as possible. To provide case contracted case managed support and monitoring for as long as needed to ensure the child's safety, stability and development in the most vulnerable long term kinship statutory placements identified as unlikely to become self-managing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children, young people (0-17) who are in a kinship placement as a result of protective intervention (excluding those in permanent care) who have been either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Referred by child protection for up to 6 months support to establish a new statutory placement, or Case contracted by child protection to CSO for case managed support to either <ul style="list-style-type: none"> assist with the transition to more self-managed/permanent care arrangement, or maintain & monitor a specific long term kinship care arrangement in best interests of child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Placement support and case contracted case managed placement support similar to that provided for children in other types of out of home care consistent with Best Interests Case Practice Model and including utilisation of LAC processes Facilitating family meetings and family decision-making processes Ensuring that optimal available supports are identified and linked in for the kinship carers Working to resolve issues impacting on carers capacity to meet child's ongoing safety, stability and developmental needs Support provided as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Placement establishment support for up to 6 months Case contracted case managed transitional support Case contracted case managed long term support.

These CSO provided kinship care service activities will complement the service components provided by Child Protection for statutory kinship placements. They will also enhance and build on informal community supports and other community services available for children in kinship care and their families, regardless of whether these are private or statutory kinship placements.

The CSO provided kinship care services must therefore be closely linked to:

- DHS Child Protection services
 - DHS funded – CSO provided family services activities including (Child FIRST accessed) integrated family services
 - DHS funded – CSO provided placement support service activities including home based care with previously unrelated (foster) carers
 - Aboriginal kinship care services (when developed)
 - Other targeted and generic services for children, youth and families operating within the sub-regional area covered by the CSO provided kinship service.
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