

## Submission to Senate Community Affairs References Committee Inquiry into Out of Home Care

### Anglicare NT

Anglicare NT is a respected provider of quality human services across urban, regional and remote areas of the Northern Territory. It employs over 300 staff delivering a wide range of services across the Northern Territory. Our motto Respect Fairness and Community articulates our values of cultural respect, social justice and partnerships. As an organisation we are committed to child safe, strength based and community development practices. Anglicare NT is a member of Anglicare Australia who have also submitted to this inquiry.

### Operating Context

Anglicare NT is contracted by the NT Government Department of Children and Families (DCF) to deliver two distinct models of OOHC services in Alice Springs, Katherine and Darwin: four General Residential Care units and two Family/Sibling Group Homes. We also deliver an NT wide After Care Support & Brokerage service known as 'Moving On'.

Anglicare NT's OOHC services provide care for young people aged between 12 to 17 years who are in the statutory care of the DCF Chief Executive Officer and who require a fulltime residential placement. The services are delivered by rotating shift workers who provide the young people with a safe nurturing and child focused home-like environment

Anglicare NT is also contracted by the Department of Children and Families to provide an Intensive Youth Support Service (IYSS) in Alice Springs, Katherine and Darwin to support highly vulnerable, high risk young people aged 10-17 years, referred by DCF. This service aims to improve the outcomes for young people to have no or reduced involvement with the Child Protection system; as well as the opportunity to develop their capacity to gain a healthy sense of self esteem and resilience that will be self sustaining throughout their life journey.

In addition to its OOHC work, Anglicare NT provides a number of programs funded by the Department of Social Services, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Department of Corrections, Department of Health and NT Department of Housing.

## Response to Terms of Reference

In addressing the Terms of Reference, Anglicare NT has intentionally focused on a number of key focus areas that we believe are critical to the delivery of OOHC services.

### **(a) Drivers of the increase in the number of children in out of home care, types of care that are increasing and demographics of the children in care**

Many children currently in residential care with 24/7 staffing models would be more suitably supported under a professional foster care model allowing children with high needs to live with a consistent carer. Anglicare NT recommends further consideration be given to the development of a professional foster care model. This would require the Australian government to support legislative changes to tax and employment law to allow the development of a legal professional foster care model and as alternative to the current 24/7 roster model.

### **(d) Current cost of Australia's approach to care and protection**

A key resource to care and protection is recruiting and retaining appropriately qualified and trained staff. While staffing is a continuing challenge in the Northern Territory due to a transient workforce, the overall minimum benchmark for staffing qualifications across the OOHC sector doesn't reflect the importance of the work undertaken and that the work is valued by government. Anglicare NT supports raising the minimum benchmark for staff qualifications and increasing funding for OOHC staffing to ensure that the very best staff can be recruited and retained.

For Anglicare NT, a critical delay in recruitment of staff that move across State and Territory borders is receiving a 'Working with Children' clearance – this can take up to three months to receive. There are a number of inconsistencies across the jurisdictions with relation to the time it takes to receive a clearance, the time the clearance is valid and notably the clearance from one jurisdiction is not recognised by other jurisdictions. Anglicare NT recommends that further consideration be given to the implementation of the Working with Children's checks across Australia that would simplify the process for staff who move interstate.

**(e) Consistency of approach and best practice**

The National OOHC Standards have provided a strong minimum requirement and have played a critical role in the NT in prior to the recent adoption of NT based standards. Further development of the National OOHC Standards is required to enhance OOHC practice across Australia and to ensure practices continue to improve.

**(g) Best practice in out of home care in Australia**

There is currently no independent scrutiny of OOHC in the NT. Anglicare NT strongly supports the need for an independent visitor program. An independent visitor program will help ensure that children and young people have an independent place to express concerns or complaints. The visitor will also improve the monitoring of the implementation of standards and notably safeguard a level of independence and impartiality that does not currently exist.

We believe the NT Office of the Children's Commissioners office is best placed to take on this function and should be given appropriate resources to demonstrate leadership in innovation and advocate for positive changes to systems in addition to current investigative work.

**(i) Extent of children in out of home care remaining connected to their family of origin**

**1. Placements close to home**

There is currently a lack of development with relation to place based remote Aboriginal community placement options to reduce the disproportionate impacts of physical dislocation from family, culture and country when children and young people are moved hundreds, sometimes thousands of kilometres away to an OOHC service, which is usually only on a temporary basis. Consideration should be given to encouraging pilots to trial the management of OOHC services within remote Aboriginal communities.

**2. Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations**

It is critical that Aboriginal children placed in care remain connected to family, culture and community. Anglicare NT believes in the long term that many Aboriginal children are best placed in care managed by Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations. Consideration should be given to development of a strategy to support Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations who might be interested, to develop OOHC capacity (in partnership with mainstream organisations where required) as has been demonstrated by the Aboriginal Child, Family & Community Care State Secretariat (Absec) in NSW.

**(j) Best practice solutions for supporting children in vulnerable family situations including early intervention**

The services mix for vulnerable children and families is significantly fragmented. Limited focus and investment has been given to early intervention, intensive family support and family reunification programs and leaving care components of the child protection and OOHC system. Anglicare NT believes there is a stronger role for the Australian government to contribute using existing structures such as COAG and Ministerial Councils to address this fragmentation and ensure that resources are committed to areas of need.

There are severely limited programs/resources targeting antenatal care, child birth education and early parenting support for young mums in the OOHC system and those at risk of entering the child protection system post the birth of their child. Anglicare NT was deeply disappointed at the recent cessation of the Pandanus service, an example of a low cost service working with destigmatised targeted child birth education and perinatal support for pregnant young women and young parents at the interface with child protection and domestic violence. Anglicare NT is concerned that there seems to be a national pattern of young parenting programs being defunded.