

October 23, 2014

Peter Sandeman's comments to parliamentary committee into child protection

- I speak not only as CEO of major Foster care support agency with experience in managing foster care support programs both here and in NSW and the ACT, but as a former foster child and adoptee.
- These experiences colour my perspective, I err on the side of the foster child and I am enormously grateful to my parents who chose me and my brothers.
- The protection of children is readily recognised as both necessary and paramount to the functioning of family and society in Australia. But the child protection system, a collective effort comprising government, not for profit agencies those actively undertaking foster care roles, cannot simply be one that is focused on keeping children safe and minimizing the trauma associated with harm. To do no harm is a necessary but not sufficient ambition for our community
- Rather it must be a system that enables children, no matter their experiences, to flourish and engage with the fullness of life that all of us would like all children to experience as they fulfill their potential to become positive, contributing adults. All families need support, some more than others, and enabling families (broadly defined) to function well is the first strategy in enabling children to grow strongly and safely.
- Indeed, AnglicareSA's vision statement of 'justice, respect and fullness of life for all' is the lens through which we would seek to create a platform of safety and security for children, particularly those in our care, that they might experience and pursue a purposeful and satisfying life.
- To work well our system requires clarification of roles, avoidance of duplication and gaps, and true partnership between Government and non-government agencies and the broader community including mainstream agencies and associations that touch the lives of families. In essence I believe there needs to be a distinction between the statutory roles which are the core functions of government and the family support functions which I believe are best achieved through non statutory agencies.
- Those that are tasked with deciding to safeguard children from harm by removing them from their families either permanently or for a limited period are unlikely to be trusted to provide support to enable families to function better. These functions are best separated in recognition (with apologies to St Paul) that departments cannot be all things to all families.
- One of the great harms of the current system is the number of placements foster children may experience. This renders the foster relationship conditional, unlike biological families which assume permanency, a foster child foster parent relationship often has a lurking latency of being broken, short term or subject to certain behaviors. I and my twin brother were extremely fortunate in that our foster parents adopted us, we only had one placement. The sense of security and well-

being of being loved and part of a family no matter what, is something many foster children do not experience.

- I am not ignorant of the challenges, nor blind to dilemmas experienced in this arena. But Anglicare understands the importance and value of a system that not only protects, but encourages and enables. This is a vision that can only be achieved where wisdom is applied to decision making, courage applied to action and aspiration applied to the future of the child protection system in our State.
- Our Child protection system has suffered greatly in the past couple of years and while this is the occasion of great pain that is yet to be resolved, the very fact of this Select Committee and the Royal Commission, may provide the impetus for change to take our system to level that our children and families require.
- I am pleased to provide this statement to the Select Committee on Statutory Child Protection and Care in South Australia on behalf of AnglicareSA. We are an organisation with a 150-year history in South Australia, and have actively been involved in the development and delivery of effective family support services through more than 90 existing programs. This includes specific engagement, support and training of around 400 foster families, who in turn care for up to 500 children under the Guardianship of the Minister or related court orders.”
- The Committee has both submissions from AnglicareSA, I would be happy to elaborate on the suggestions but it may more a more effective use of our time for me to respond to questions. One matter which is not covered in our submissions is to have the Care Concern Investigations Unit function to be removed from the portfolio and to operate more as an Ombudsman function, investigating allegations and complaints within the department and the non-government agencies.

KEY TALKING POINTS

- AnglicareSA made a Submission and an Addendum Submission to the Select Committee in July 2014 and August 2014. The recommendations provided by AnglicareSA via both submissions, and related key points made are:
 1. Recruitment and registration of foster carers be provided by registered foster care agencies.
 - overlapping and consequent confusion for stakeholders regarding the responsibilities and roles of foster care agencies and Families SA
 - enables simplification and streamlining of processes, shifting total responsibility for all aspects of foster care recruitment and registration to service providers
 - requires re-examination of the legislative limitations currently in place

2. Case management of children (U18 years) in care be the responsibility of non-government service providers, whilst partnering with government agencies regarding 'guardianship' responsibilities and related decision making.
 - recommendation applies to children under long term orders only (Guardianship to 18 years)
 - Aligning case management responsibilities with the same body that oversees day to day support needs brings clarity for all stakeholders, increases system efficiencies and improves effectiveness of informed decision making
 - separates 'parental decision making' from legal guardianship concerns, the latter being Families SA role
 - Parental decision making can then be transferred to foster parents on a case by case basis with a strong commitment to supporting the parental standing of foster carers.
3. Unit costing be developed and implemented for specified classes of care management.
 - uses consistent pricing for particular classes of care shifts the focus of competition to service quality not cost, and encourages innovation and effectiveness associated with outcomes
 - offers Families SA a better evidence base and greater justification for a sustainable budget in the long term
4. A stronger partnering approach is developed through the establishment of a Ministerial Advisory Council (MAC) and a well-planned, collaborative, across sector partnership framework.
 - A MAC would offer confidential, informed expert advice to the Minister and Families SA
 - It would create the space for confidential debate and discussion, enabling greater collective courage, foresight and planning in funding, regulating and service delivery
 - NSW has used a similar Government/Community Sector advisory committee to successfully progress change
5. Further investigation and public consultation is undertaken to consider greater opportunities for permanency of care for children where appropriate to do so.
 - permanency practices increase household and care environment stability for the child, diversifies the number and type of foster carers available and decreases caseloads for child protection officers
 - reduces cost to government through the transfer of full care responsibilities
 - a shift towards this practice would need to be based on clear permanency principles
6. Prioritising rapid comprehensive assessment and support responses at the point a child is removed to either:
 - 6.1. more efficiently and successfully reunify children with their families, or
 - 6.2. place children under long term guardianship in a more timely manner where family re-unification is considered unlikely
 - A recent report by the Office for the Guardian of Children and Young People identified that "at 30 June 2012, of the 2,546 children in out-of-home care in South Australia, almost 1 in every 5 children had had between 6 and 10 placement moves and another 1 in 7 had had more than ten placement moves". Other studies have shown related disruption through children having to change schools (33%) as a result of moving placements .

- prioritising a more comprehensive assessment and support process at the point of the removal of a child, will enable:
 - improved decision making around supporting reunification or best connection with family;
 - improved 'matching' of foster carers with children to promote placement success; and
 - improved longer term stability either through the process of reunification or towards permanency of placement.
7. Transition the management of Community Residential Care units to community agencies
- alignment of the day to day care responsibilities with the same body that oversees foster care offers smoother transition across these placement options, and increases system efficiencies and effectiveness of informed decision making
 - financial benefits of a transition to the community sector for service delivery would potentially create opportunities to provide additional therapeutic programs to support the opportunity for successful outcomes through these placements.