

Understanding the Transition Plan

What is driving this change?

Successive reports and reviews have agreed that non-government agencies are best placed to deliver quality out of home care services. A key message from the 2008 Wood Inquiry was that child protection is a collective responsibility. Only where parents, families and communities were not able to rear and support their children, should the government step in.

The Inquiry stressed that this collective responsibility had to be taken on by more than one government agency and be extended to non-government agencies if NSW was to make improvements to its child protection system and enhance capacity to provide the quality services families need as well as to meet future demands for services. To this end the Inquiry made many recommendations for expanding the role of non-government service providers in child protection – not just in out-of-home care, but also in prevention and early intervention.

The NSW Government believes transferring services to the non-government sector will provide opportunities to deliver services in new, innovative and different ways. It will help build a system where out-of-home care services are integrated with family focused services designed to prevent children from coming into care or minimising the length of time children stay in care.

This is not about replacing one system at the expense of the other - it is about building the capacity of the whole system to better respond to vulnerable children and families.

What type of out-of-home care placements will be transitioned?

All statutory out-of-home care placements where Parental Responsibility rests with the Minister for Family and Community Services will move to non-government agencies over time, this includes statutory foster care and statutory relative/kinship care.

All other types of non-statutory care arrangements, including supported care, will continue to be provided by Community Services.

How quickly will it happen?

Transition will take place according to service capacity and demand. Success and stability will be valued more than expediency. It is expected that it will take up to five years to transfer most placements to non-government agencies but it may take even longer for the non-government sector to develop capacity across all placement types, populations and regions.

What does this mean for kids currently in care?

Kids in care should not experience any disruption. If a placement is meeting their needs, children will stay with their carers and they will move to a non-government agency together and build a relationship with a new caseworker. Moving together to a non-government agency won't mean a change of address and kids in care can still see their friends and families just like they do now.

All changes will be built around the needs of children and their families. Transition will happen at a time and a pace that suits the kids currently in care. The rights of kids in care will not be affected.

What about Aboriginal kids in care?

Ultimately, all Aboriginal kids in care will be cared for by Aboriginal carers, supported by Aboriginal caseworkers employed by local Aboriginal managed agencies. But this will take some time. Aboriginal kids will transfer as soon as a local Aboriginal agency has the capacity to accept them. Aboriginal kids in a stable placement will be able to stay with their current carer.

All Aboriginal kids in care must be placed in a culturally appropriate setting with a strong preference for placements in Aboriginal community controlled organisations or in non-Aboriginal agencies working in partnership with a local Aboriginal agency, with a view to developing capacity and independence.

What does this mean for birth families?

Full case files will be passed to non-government agencies along with the placements. Access and contact arrangements should not be affected.

What does this mean for current Community Services carers?

By the end of the transition period nearly all of the carers looking after children in statutory out-of-home care will be supported by a non-government agency. Non-government agencies will rely on the skills and experience of the hundreds of carers who have been part of the Community Services program. Many of these carers will transfer to non-government agencies and they will have access to greater levels of support from non-government agency caseworkers.

The first wave of transfers between Community Services and non-government agencies will be those where carers have volunteered to move to a local non-government agency.

Community Services carers can apply to be carers for non-government agencies whether or not they are currently caring for children placed by Community Services.

Non-government agencies are obliged to assess and approve all carers. A carer authorisation gained from Community Services is not automatically transferable to a non-government agency. Non-government agencies intend to make their carer authorisation processes as quick as possible to help speed up transfers.

What does this mean for current non-government agency carers?

Growth across the non-government sector could mean more opportunities for carers to change to other non-government agencies or provide care to children in different types of placements. For example, carers may consider taking children in short-term care, rather than those needing longer-term placements.

Non-government agencies will increase the size of their staff teams in line with the number of kids in their care. This means the level of support available to carers who already work for non-government agencies should not be reduced.

What does this mean for people who want to become carers?

In future all new carers will be recruited, assessed and supported directly by non-government agencies. While non-government agencies are developing their capacity, Community Services may still need to recruit some carers. People who want to become carers can ask local non-government agencies and local Community Services staff about opportunities in their area.

The generic foster care recruitment website and information line – Fostering NSW – will remain available for potential carers to learn more about foster care and find out about the non-government agencies in their area.

What does this mean for the non-government sector?

The non-government sector needs to become over five times the size it is now. Many existing agencies will become bigger and some new players are expected in the market.

What does this mean for Aboriginal non-government agencies?

Eventually Aboriginal kids in care will be looked after by carers and caseworkers from Aboriginal non-government agencies. The Aboriginal non-government sector needs to become over eight times the size it is now and it is expected that this may take as long as ten years in some areas.

Existing Aboriginal non-government agencies will need to take on more staff, carers and placements. There will be a capacity building program to assist them.

In some areas of the state there is no Aboriginal agency in place to take on out-of-home care contracts. The best way to develop new local agencies will be through developing partnerships with agencies that are already accredited and can take on the responsibility of the placements as the new agency develops capacity and independence.

What does this mean for non-Aboriginal non-government agencies?

Some non-Aboriginal non-government agencies that are already providing placements will grow their existing capacity and/or expand into new regions to provide services. New service providers may be required in some areas to meet the demand for placements. Agencies will need to develop partnerships with new providers in their region to ensure good outcomes for kids in care.

Some non-Aboriginal non-government agencies will develop partnerships to support Aboriginal agencies to provide out-of-home care programs. Over time, Aboriginal kids in care will stop being placed in non-Aboriginal agencies.

How will Community Services staff and non-government agencies work together to facilitate the transfer?

Regional Community Services staff and non-government agency staff have a great history of supporting each others' work. It is expected that they will continue to forge a strong working relationship. Community Services will continue to play an active role in supporting agencies through informal capacity building activities. Some areas of continued collaboration include: seconding staff, joint training, exchange programs, mentoring, and participation on recruitment panels.

What happens next?

The Ministerial Advisory Group drafted the Stage 1 Transition Plan which was approved by the Minister Goward in November 2011. Now that the broad direction has been agreed different stakeholders are working to develop implementation plans.

Regional implementation groups will be established to help ensure regional implementation plans are rolled out in a way that is appropriate for local needs.

To get more information about the transition of out-of-home-care service provision in NSW to the non-government sector visit the following websites: ACWA, AbSec and FACS-Community Services.