

### What has changed?

In September 2013, the Chief Executive, Community Services endorsed a change in the role that Preparation for Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) Adoption Seminars play in the adoption of a child or young person in OOHC.

From 1 October 2013, authorised carers applying to adopt a child or young person in their care will be required to participate in a Preparation for OOHC Adoption Seminar before they can progress to the next stage in the process.

Preparation for OOHC Adoption Seminars represent an important way for carers to learn about adoption and providing a 'home for life' for the child in their care. This new requirement recognises that carers who make the decision to adopt a child or young person in their care deserve the best possible information to support their decision to give a 'home for life' for the child in their care.

Improvements in the delivery of Preparation for OOHC Adoption Seminars is a part of the improved streamlining of OOHC adoption processes, ensuring comprehensive and consistent advice is given to all prospective adoptive parents.

### The importance of participation in OOHC adoption seminars

Preparation for OOHC Adoption Seminars are designed to provide carers with an understanding of the differences in parenting a child who is under the parental responsibility of the Minister to parenting an adopted child. Information provided through these seminars is an essential part of this important decision making process and a necessary part of carers' preparation for assessment.

At the Preparation for OOHC Adoption Seminars, carers learn about:

- the OOHC adoption process
- open adoption
- what the assessment process entails
- the timeframes for progressing an adoption
- the circumstances where adoptions may be contested
- the lodging of an adoption application with the Court
- the experiences and issues of other carers applying to adopt.

Whether carers are at the Enquiry or Assessment stage of the OOHC adoption process, they must participate in a Preparation for OOHC Adoption Seminar before they can progress to the next stage. Participation will ensure carers are well placed and prepared for the assessment and later stages of the adoption process. Participation also provides an opportunity for carers to indicate their ongoing interest to adopt the child or young person in their care.

A request to adopt made by carers who do not participate in a Preparation for OOHC Adoption Seminar will remain at their current stage of the adoption process until such time as they participate in a seminar.

### When Preparation for OOHC Adoption Seminars are held

Preparation for OOHC Adoption Seminars are held by Community Services in response to demand and when resources permit.

Attempts are always made to hold Preparation for OOHC Adoption Seminars as central to participants as is practical and where resources permit. In late 2013, Community Services will conduct a series of seminars at locations across NSW.

### Legitimate reasons for not participating in a Preparation for OOHC Adoption Seminar

Community Services recognises there are a wide range of possible reasons why carers might not be able to participate in a Preparation for OOHC Adoption Seminar. These reasons might include work commitments, distance, expense, childcare and health issues.

Preparation for OOHC Adoption Seminars are free. However, potential help for carers to participate in these seminars may be considered on a case-by-case basis. To discuss individual circumstances, carers should contact their caseworker or the OOHC duty officer at their Community Services Centre or agency OOHC case worker.

### Carers who have participated in an OOHC Adoption Seminar when previously adopting from care

Carers expressing an interest in adopting a child in their care who have previously adopted a child in their care, or who are at the late stages of that child's adoption process, are likely to have already attended a Preparation for OOHC Adoption Seminar. Where a carer is applying to adopt a child in their care and have already attended a Preparation for OOHC Adoption Seminar, they will not be required to attend an additional seminar unless Community Services determines that there have been significant changes to the *Adoption Act 2000* or other adoption reforms have taken place in the interim period.

Your OOHC caseworker will be able to provide advice on whether your attendance at a Preparation for OOHC Adoption Seminar is required.

### The participation of both carers in a couple

All carers adopting a child in their care are required to participate in a Preparation for OOHC Adoption Seminar. Where two carers have expressed an interest in adopting as a couple, then both partners are required to attend. An expression of interest to adopt will not progress until both partners have participated.

Each carer may participate in different Preparation for OOHC Adoption Seminars.

If one of the carers within the relationship have previously attended a Preparation for OOHC Adoption Seminar they will not be required to attend another one unless Community Services determines that there have been significant changes to the *Adoption Act 2000* or other adoption reforms have taken place in the interim period.

### When you can participate in a seminar

When you and the case manager of your agency out-of-home care service or Community Services Centre have agreed at a case meeting to explore adoption of the child in your care, your caseworker will arrange for your name to be included on the list of carers ready to attend a Preparation for OOHC Adoption Seminar. Depending on demand and when resources permit, you will receive an invitation including a schedule of seminars whereby you can confirm your attendance.

### Other organisations providing OOHC adoption seminars

At present, Barnardos NSW also provides OOHC adoption seminars. However, presently these seminars are currently only provided to Barnardos carers.

### Who you can speak to about this change

Carers with questions or concerns about the new requirement of participation may discuss these with their Community Services or agency OOHC caseworker. Carers currently without an assigned caseworker may contact their local Community Services Centre and ask to speak with the OOHC Duty Officer.