

CARER REFERENCE GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE

Background

The NSW Out-of-Home Care Standards are used by the Office of the Children's Guardian for the accreditation and quality improvement of out-of-home care services (OOHC) in NSW.

The standards include that authorised carers should be given the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes and development opportunities and give feedback on how out-of-home care services are provided.

The Carer Reference Group (CRG) provides a collaborative and interagency setting for carers to work alongside out-of-home care staff from both non-government agencies and Community Services, to participate and contribute to the service system.

CRGs enable a more localised approach to participation and help inform decision-making and improvements to foster, relative and kinship care in NSW.

CRG representation reflects the changed out-of-home care sector given the transition of out-of-home care from Family and Community Services to the non-government sector – with more than 40 agencies now delivering foster care services.

More broadly, Carer Reference Groups embed carer participation into localised service delivery so carers' voices may be heard and contribute to building a stronger out-of-home care system in NSW.

Goals

- establish a platform (or setting) whereby carers, non-government agencies and Community Services can work together to strengthen foster and relative/kinship care services - with a focus on carer support, training, retention, peer support and recruitment.
- provide a localised setting for carers, carer representatives, Agencies and Family and Community Services to work together to identify issues and opportunities to achieve better outcomes for children and young people in care.

Objectives

Carer Reference Groups benefit local children and young people in care, their families and carers and the local delivery of out-of-home care services by:

- authorised carers, carer representatives, Agencies and Community Services work together to improve services in the district/area by increasing carers' participation in service delivery issues.
- providing a forum for authorised carers to offer feedback and raise issues on policies, protocols, service models and other issues - enabling the carers' perspective to inform local planning and service delivery.
- improving carer support, recruitment and retention and complaints management by identifying issues and solutions and examples of best practice.

- working constructively to promote a culture of continuous improvement in carer support and retention to benefit the delivery of out-of-home care in NSW
- highlighting matters referred by peer support groups or other carer groups where appropriate, particularly issues or topics that may have a broader (e.g state-wide) aspect or learning (e.g improving systems or practices).

Membership

Membership is to reflect the diversity of carers and carer types within each area of NSW – with consideration for the size and capacity of the group and the constraints of operating effectively.

Composition will include carers, carer representatives, Agency and Community Services representatives. Representation from the OOHC Regional Implementation Group is also required.

Membership must adhere to the following:

- be broadly representative of carers from the area/district or community
- comprise authorised carers and carer representative/s (e.g from a carer organisation)
- non-government agency representatives and government representatives.
- representation from the OOHC Regional Implementation Group
- be selected through a process that supports diversity and is transparent.
- serve approximately 12-18 month terms, subject to local issues and work
- work together to select or elect co-chairs who co-chair meetings
- where required replace a member through a localised, transparent process which may be initiated to seek new membership.

Member responsibilities

- notify the chairperson at least 24 hours before if they are unable to attend a meeting.
- refrain from raising individual issues or cases at meetings and ensure the focus reflects the best interest of children and young people and a constructive approach.
- cooperate with others to ensure the meetings operate effectively and efficiently
- treat all members with courtesy and respect
- seek the chairperson's agreement to represent the CRG at public forums, meetings, conferences, in the media etc.
- contribute constructively to discussions on out-of-home care issues referred by the Regional Implementation Group, Family and Community Services or other OOHC bodies/groups (for example peer support groups, CREATE).
- act with diligence and care in carrying out the duties of the Carer Reference Group
- disclose any conflicts of interest, including financial or personal benefit.

Chairperson's responsibilities

- convene and chair or co-chair meetings and prepare the meeting agenda seeking input from group members.
- organise the taking of minutes (*it is recommended this be shared or rotated between Agency and Community Services staff attending*), their sign-off and distribution, including the action list and minutes, within the two weeks following a meeting.
- ensure meetings are run purposefully and efficiently and that all members are treated with courtesy and respect.
- liaise with the RIG representative to support reporting on the activities (recommendations, feedback etc) of the Carer Reference Group.
- promote the activities or actions (where appropriate) of the Carer Reference Group to carers within the district/area e.g via Agency and carer networks.

Note: A copy of the CRG minutes should be provided for reporting to the RIG and a copy sent to the mailbox: carerreferencegroupsnsw@fac.s.nsw.gov.au.

Regional Implementation Group representative responsibilities

- ensure key issues or items from the Regional Implementation Group are referred to the CRG for input and feedback where relevant or appropriate.
- promote the CRG as a valuable advisory and consultation resource to promote continuous improvement in localised OOHC service delivery.
- report to the RIG matters, issues or actions from the Carer Reference Group.
- act as a champion for the Carer Reference Group - supporting a participatory and interagency setting for contributing and enhancing OOHC services and systems.

Meeting frequency

Each Carer Reference Group is to meet a minimum of four times per year. Additional meetings or events may be agreed by members, with consideration about the practical challenges of distance, travel time and availability.

A CRG may determine the need for a sub-group to work on a particular task. The sub-group must report to the CRG /or to the RIG. This is at the discretion of the co-chairs.

Expenses

Membership on the Carer Reference Group is voluntary (unpaid). Where a carer is required to travel distance, then travel may be claimed or reimbursed at the discretion of the OOHC Manager from the relevant OOHC Agency or Community Services.

Recognition of participation

It is recommended carer participation on the CRG be recognised on the carer's file. Similarly, Agency staff be recognised as a learning and development opportunity. From time to time training and forum opportunities may be offered to all members.

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