

27 August 2015

Children's Commissioner releases first State of Care report

Children's Commissioner Dr Russell Wills today released his Office's first public annual report on the service Child, Youth and Family provides to our most vulnerable children.

The *State of Care 2015* report is a summary of findings and recommendations from the Office of the Children's Commissioner's independent monitoring of Child, Youth and Family's policies, practices and services. It includes feedback from children and young people about their experiences in the system.

While the report found pockets of excellent practice within Child, Youth and Family, it also highlights inconsistencies in the care and services provided to children. It also reveals a lack of accessible information about how well children are doing while in care and their outcomes once they have left the system.

"When children are in care, Child, Youth and Family is effectively their parent. That is a significant responsibility. These children should come out of the system in a better place and with the prospect of better future lives. Unfortunately we can't say they are," he said.

"Over the last few years I have seen some major changes in child protection, including the new Children's Action Plan and the introduction of Children's Teams. In addition, the Minister of Social Development recently initiated a substantial review of Child, Youth and Family.

"I welcome this review as it has the mandate to examine the systems and structures of the organisation in depth and effect lasting change. My hope is that the recommendations in our *State of Care* report, including the clear messages from children and young people about what they need, will support the Minister's expert panel in their work," he said.

"Fundamentally, children, like all of us, expect to be treated with care and respect. Our report suggests that as an organisation, Child, Youth and Family does not consistently put children at the centre of everything it does.

"Our analysis is that Child, Youth and Family is very focused on keeping children safe and managing the intake and assessment processes at entry to the system. They've lost sight of what children need while in care and what they need to receive to ensure they thrive once they've left. That concerns me.

"For example, the organisation is not consistently supporting the large number of children in care with Maori whakapapa to identify with their culture. Young people tell us this is a critical factor in coming out of care feeling confident and in a good place for the future. Several individual sites and residences are doing an exceptional job of being culturally responsive, but others are not making it a priority.

"We found some excellent examples of agencies working well together for the benefit of children, including those gearing up for Children's Teams. But largely, we found less collaboration than we would like. Children are falling through large cracks in the system as a result. Child, Youth and Family need to take the lead on fixing this, supported by other agencies that have a responsibility in children's lives.

"We've been surprised by the difficulty in accessing information about the outcomes for these children. The data we have seen is concerning. In education for example, children in care are falling way behind, with just 20 percent achieving NCEA level 2, compared to the national average of 70 percent.

"There are many individual staff doing a great job under the strain of immense workloads. We've seen some outstanding examples of practice where children are well cared for and feel safe and supported.

"I have plenty of optimism for the future. There are dedicated, skilled people working in this organisation and the prospect of many positive changes ahead. Our vulnerable children deserve our full attention and the very best quality care."

Notes:

Headline recommendations in the *State of Care* 2015 report are:

1. Set clear expectations
2. Be fully child-centred
3. Invest in children in care placements
4. Address capacity and capability issues
5. Improve cultural capability
6. Use data to drive improved outcomes
7. Set clear expectations for other agencies

The Children's Commissioner is an independent crown entity. The role is mandated to independently monitor services to children under the Child, Young Person and their Families Act, 1989. In practice, this involves monitoring the policy, practice and service provided by Child, Youth and Family.

This is our first annual report. It aggregates the findings of the monitoring reports we completed for a sample of Child, Youth and Family sites and residences between January 2014 and June 2015, and summarises the voices of children in care who shared their views with us during that time.

Information that could identify individual children, staff members, sites, or residences has been removed to protect privacy and preserve our ability to engage openly with CYF and other stakeholders in future.

We will use the findings of this report to inform our monitoring and advocacy work in the next 12 months, and we will publish another *State of Care* report in 2016.

The report is available on-line at www.occ.org.nz/state-of-care