

Guardian for Children and Young People 2008-09 Audit of Annual Reviews

Summary Report

September 2009

It is required by law in South Australia that there will be a review at least once in each year of the circumstances of each child under the guardianship of the Minister until the child attains 18 years of age (*Children's Protection Act 1993*, Section 52 [1]).

The review panel, which is convened by Families SA, must consider whether the existing arrangements for the care and protection of the child are still in the best interests of the child.

The Guardian monitors the wellbeing of children in care in South Australia and advocates for improvements in the systems that serve them.

The Office of the Guardian attends and audits annual reviews to:

- provide further external accountability on review panels
- provide some external scrutiny of case management practice and interagency collaboration
- advocate for quality outcomes for children and young people

We aim to attend ten per cent of reviews. In 2008-09 we attended 93 reviews in total, conducted in 13 District Centres. This represents 5.7 per cent of the reviews that should have been conducted in the year.

High quality annual reviews

A good annual review is one where the focus is on the quality of the child or young person's care arrangements. Consideration should be given to stability, sense of belonging, connectedness to carer family and birth family, cultural identity, physical safety, emotional security, development opportunities, academic achievement and the child's wishes now and for the future. It is not an administrative process. It is a creative, personal process which, properly undertaken, requires the active participation of the child, their carers, relevant agencies, and where appropriate, the birth family.

Our audit of annual reviews has focused on:

- stability of placement
- individual needs of the child
- connection to significant others
- identified practice issues
- voice of the child in case planning and decision making
- identified systems issues
- interagency collaboration
- education
- cultural connections and
- preparation and provision of information such as a Life Story Book, *Charter of Rights* and being in care materials

Findings

A full report of the audit is provided to the Minister for Families and Communities, following a discussion of the findings with the Families SA executive. This is a summary only of the report.

Our audit in 2008-09 found that:

- Seventy-eight per cent of children and young people whose cases were reviewed were in stable, long-term placements.
- Ninety per cent of children and young people whose cases were reviewed were receiving services to meet their needs.
- Ninety-one per cent of children and young people whose cases were reviewed have at least one significant adult in their life.
- Eight adolescents approaching independence did not have any significant connections beyond Families SA.
- Eight of the 13 eligible young people did not have transition plans.
- Connections between siblings in separate placements remain an issue.
- Eighteen per cent of children and young people whose cases were reviewed do not have regular contact with the same case worker (five cases are unallocated and 12 children received less than the recommended monthly face-to-face contact).
- Twenty-one per cent of children and young people whose cases were reviewed participated in their annual review. Sixty-eight per cent of children whose cases were reviewed were heard through their case worker and/or carer.
- Eleven per cent of children and young people whose cases were reviewed did not have a voice in case planning and annual reviews.
- Eighty-three per cent of school-age children whose cases were reviewed had Individual Education Plans documented on their files.
- Sixty-eight per cent of the Aboriginal children whose cases were reviewed were placed with their extended family or with Aboriginal carers.
- Sixty-eight per cent of children and young people whose cases were reviewed have been provided with, and understand, the Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Care.
- Fifty-four per cent of children and young people reviewed have a Life Story Book.

Improvements

Based on comparison with the 2007–08 Audit of Annual Reviews it appears that improvements have been achieved in the following areas:

- engagement of services to meet the individual needs of children and young people
- children and young people having an allocated case worker
- implementation of Individual Education Plans
- provision of the Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Care
- engaging children and young people to create their Life Story Books.

It is also evident though that a significant minority of children and young people in care experience delays or disadvantage in these areas.

No change or decline Similar results to last year have been obtained in the following areas

- stability of placement
- connections to significant others
- number of children receiving less than the standard monthly face-to-face contact with their allocated worker.

Of particular concern is the decrease of the participation of children and young people in annual reviews and case planning. It is important that children and young people in care have knowledge of and participate in decisions that affect their care and their lives.