

Guardian for Children
and Young People

**Children and Young People in Care
What we know from the annual reviews of
their circumstances**

**Report of the 2011-12 Audit of Annual
Reviews**

August 2012



Government
of South Australia

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1 Introduction

An annual review of a child's circumstances is required by law when a child is under the long-term guardianship of the Minister. More significantly though, it is a 'pause' in the day to day business of parenting a child who is in care. It is a time for reflection on the goals and ambitions, achievements and challenges for each child or young person. It is sometimes the one time in a year when the many adults in a child's life can confer on whether they can 'parent' better.

The Office of the Guardian (GCYP) attends some of the reviews as part of its monitoring function and to advocate for improved outcomes. It is an external audit process that provides feedback to the child protection agency on the circumstances for children and the quality of the casework service.

In 2011-12 the Office audited 194 reviews at 15 Families SA offices, or 9.2 per cent of the reviews which were to be conducted in that year. The audit is an important balance to the Office's other monitoring activities because the other activities tend towards where there are problems. Annual reviews provide GCYP with the opportunity to witness excellent care and service but also to identify where there are recurring problems.

For example, it is reassuring to record and report that more than eight out of every ten children and young people whose cases were reviewed were in stable, long-term placements. It is equally important though to identify why the other two of ten are in unstable circumstances. The audit function has been applied consistently for four years and the trend data is increasingly useful to analyse where improvements have been made or where issues are stubbornly persistent.

The value of the audit report lies in:

- The discussion that it generates about the quality of care and casework practice.
- The transparency of external scrutiny, feedback and public reporting.
- The impartial view of how children in care are faring as a group.

The audit process is greatly strengthened by the cooperation of Families SA and their openness to the feedback and the reports.

2 Annual Reviews

2.1 Purpose of Annual Reviews

It is a legislative requirement 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 must consider whether the existing arrangements for the care and protection of the child continue to be in the best interests of the child.

Annual reviews are an important means of monitoring the quality of services provided and outcomes achieved.

A high standard annual review is one where the focus is on the quality of the child or young person's care arrangements with consideration given to their 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. A review properly undertaken requires the active participation of the child, their carers, relevant agencies, and where appropriate, the birth family.¹

2.2 Audit of Annual Reviews

The purpose of the Office of the Guardian's participation in, and audit of, annual reviews is:

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

2.3 2011-12 Audit

The Office of the Guardian's goal for 2011-12 was to attend 200 annual reviews in the reporting period, to maintain its attendance at ten per cent of annual reviews to be conducted. The Office attended 194 annual reviews in the year, equivalent to 9.2 per cent of children and young people under long-term orders.²

¹ Families SA has policy and procedure for annual reviews which emphasise the active involvement of others.

² As at 30 June 2011.

Each Families SA office has its own schedule for reviews and the Office of the Guardian (GCYP) has accommodated this. Throughout the reporting period GCYP had regular opportunities to attend annual reviews for auditing purposes. On six occasions GCYP declined invitations to attend scheduled annual reviews due to prior commitments with other offices. In addition, some offices may have conducted annual reviews without informing GCYP of the opportunity to attend. Within a week of the audit in each office, feedback is provided to the Manager of the Families SA office and to the Regional Director. The offices visited in 2011-12 are in Appendix A.

2.4 Limitations of the audit process

The limitations of the GCYP audit process include that GCYP has no control over the cases reviewed and only attends those that the Families SA office has decided are due for review.

The audit does not include examination of the case file nor does the auditor pursue information beyond what is presented to the panel. The focus of the audit is on knowledge of the child, the quality of care and the engagement with the child or young person.

It is acknowledged that the task of scheduling annual reviews is significant, particularly with facilitating participatory reviews, and that a number of offices have encountered difficulties achieving this.

The findings of this report should be read with these limitations in mind.

2.5 Constitution of panels

The Families SA annual review guidelines include instruction about participation of children, young people and significant others. However, most offices still conduct them with only Families SA workers present.

Within metropolitan offices, it is typically the Connected Care supervisor responsible for the case who convenes and chairs the panel.³ In two offices, the Families SA Manager attended and participated in discussions. Three metropolitan offices also engaged a Principal Social Worker in the review panel. The Principal Social Workers were highly engaged in the annual reviews conducted in country offices, and on most occasions, chaired the panel.

Three offices facilitated the participation of an independent panel member, such as a supervisor from another office or staff member from another agency. In four offices, where there is more than one Connected Care team, a supervisor from

³ Connected Care is the name of the social worker teams which have responsibility for children and young people under longer term care and protection court orders or family care meeting agreements.

another team either participated as a panel member or chaired the panel discussion.

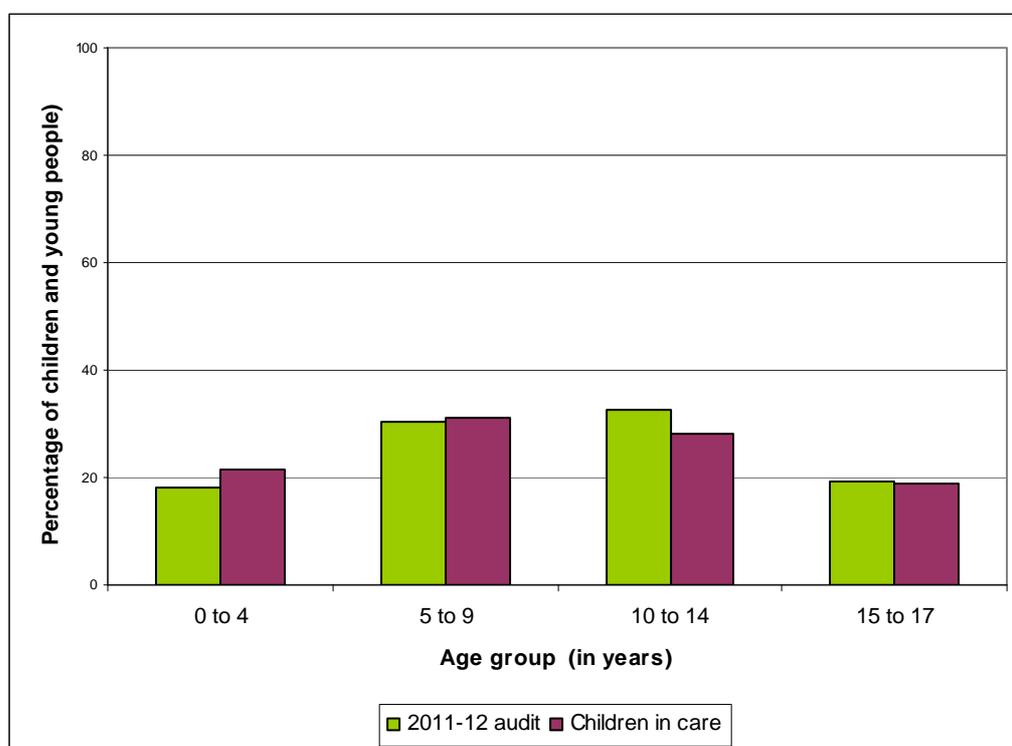
On four visits to Families SA offices, annual reviews were conducted solely by the supervisor, not a panel. On three of these occasions, a second panel member was unavailable due to illness and on the fourth occasion, a second panel member was unavailable due to other work demands.

All offices included a cultural representative on the panel for reviews of the circumstances of Aboriginal children. Primarily this was achieved with the presence of a Principal Aboriginal Consultant or an Aboriginal Senior Project Officer. On one occasion, impacting on two children, scheduled annual reviews proceeded without a cultural consultant. The requirement to have a cultural consultant was discussed and documented as part of the annual review outcomes in these cases.

3 Findings

Graph 1 illustrates the ages of children and young people whose cases were reviewed as part of our audit of annual reviews, and compares the percentage of each age group against the profile of children and young people in care.⁴

Graph 1. Ages of children and young people whose cases were reviewed



3.1 Placement

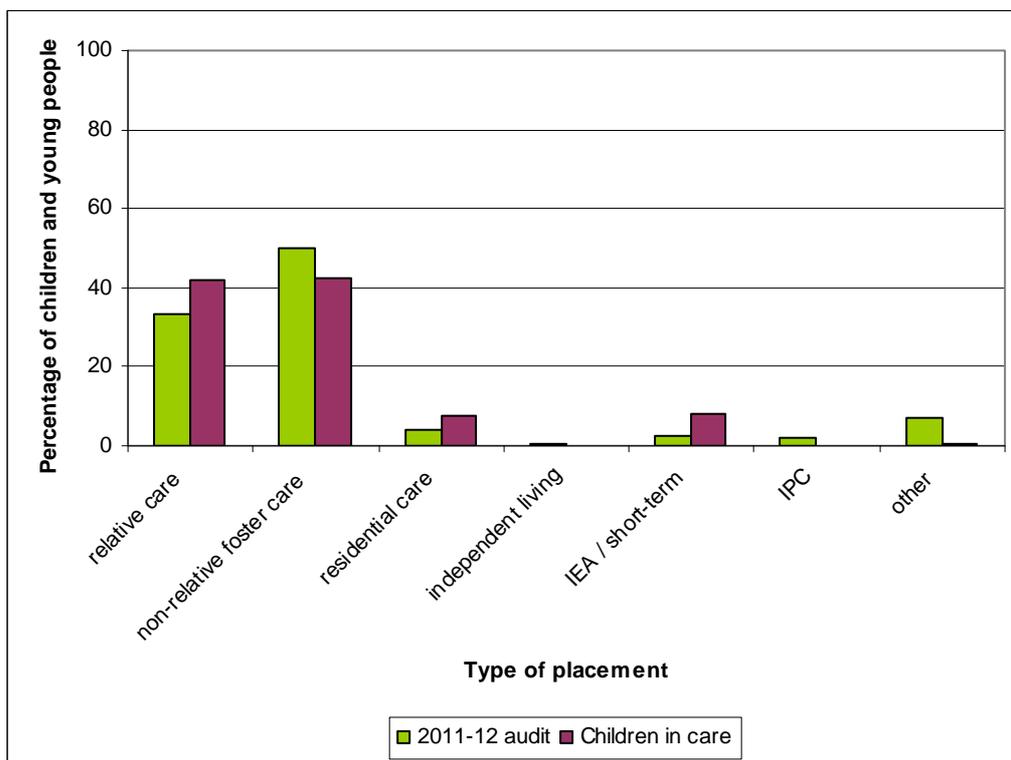
3.1.1 Type of placement

Graph 2 illustrates the placements of children whose annual reviews were audited in the reporting period. Almost 85 per cent of children resided in family-based care, either with relatives or foster carers. The placement profile of the sample group is generally reflective of the placement profile of all children and young people in care and is consistent with findings in previous years. The category 'other' includes

⁴ As at 30 December 2011.

children and young people who have returned to the care of their parent(s) or self-placed with others without the approval of Families SA. Such arrangements are not formally regarded as 'placements' as they are not officially approved by Families SA.

Graph 2. Type of placement⁵



3.1.2 Stability of placement

Long-term, stable placement

In 167 cases (86 per cent) reviewed, the children or young people were in stable long-term placements.⁶ Last year there had been a significant decline in stability from the previous two years (2009-10 and 2008-09). This appears to have been a single year dip in stability, with recent results returning to around 85 per cent stability rate (see Graph 3).

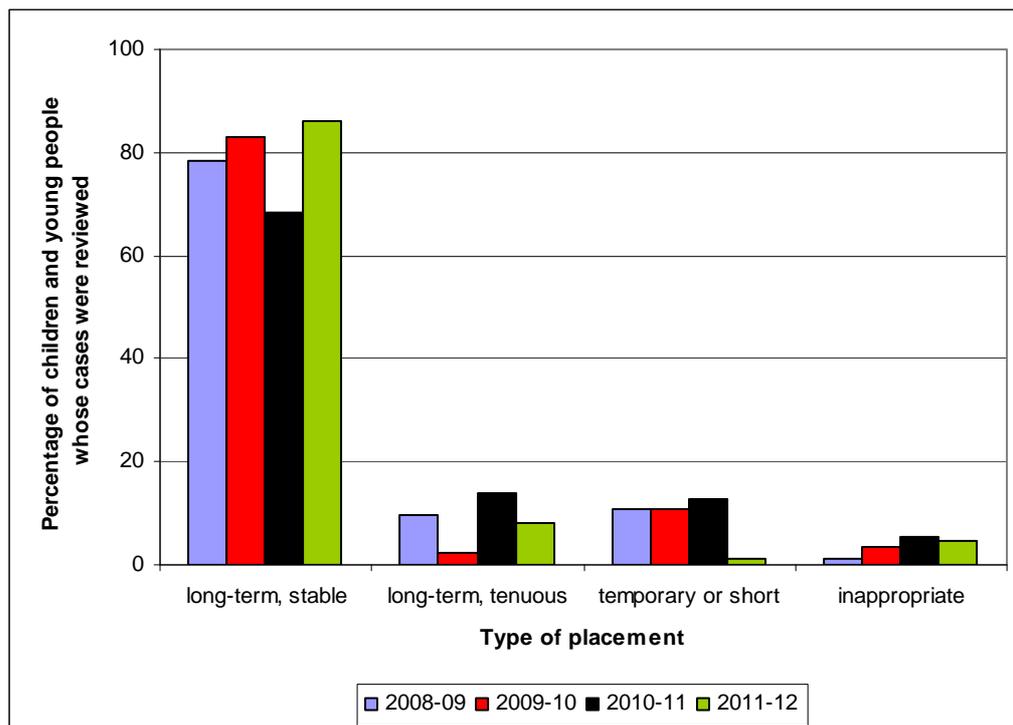
There were 16 adolescents who had been with their carers since early childhood. Seven children and young people had been identified by Families SA for possible

⁵ As at 31 December 2011, there were 2 476 children and young people in alternative care placements. This data is drawn from Families SA figures on children under the guardianship of the Minister, and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data on children in alternative care. Those under guardianship and those in alternative care placements are overlapping but not identical populations.

⁶ In 2010-11, 68 per cent of children and young people reviewed were in long-term, stable placements.

transfer of legal guardianship to their long-term carers (known as 'other person guardianship'), reflecting the wishes of the children and the carers.

Graph 3. Stability of placement



Long-term, tenuous placement

Sixteen (eight per cent) long-term placements were experiencing significant strain and were considered at risk of breakdown. It was difficult to determine the future stability of these placements. There were various reasons for these circumstances, including, but not limited to:

- Carer’s deteriorating health
- Ageing of long-term carers with younger children
- Personal and family circumstances of carers
- Inability for carers to commit to long-term care of multiple children.

Temporary or short-term placement

Two (one per cent) children were in relatively new placements or arrangements that were considered temporary.

Inappropriate placement

Nine children (five per cent) were in 'placements' considered inappropriate. Four adolescents were regarded as 'self-placed' and were reported to intermittently move between family and friends. In two cases the case managing offices' attempts to secure alternative placements had been unsuccessful. In the remaining two cases it was reported that Placement Services Unit had informed the case managing office that no placements were available.

Five children were placed in motel-type accommodation at the time of their annual reviews; three of them aged less than 12 years. The long-term plan for a child aged 14 years had been to continue their 'placement' in commercial care but this was challenged and changed in the annual review.

History of placement instability

Twenty-four children and young people (12 per cent) had experienced a significant number of placement changes during their time in care, including emergency care, short-term and respite while other long-term placement options were sourced. In eight of these cases the children and young people had a significant history of absconding from placements, at times to seek a return to their families.

In five offices there were children adversely impacted by apparent delays in obtaining therapeutic foster care placements and approved 'individual packages of care'.⁷

Boys and girls aged nine to fifteen years, who had experienced significant trauma and exhibited particularly challenging behaviours encountered the most placement instability. Some of the additional factors contributing to instability included:

- More than one child in the placement and the carer(s) experiencing significant difficulty managing the challenging behaviours displayed by one or more of the children.
- Perceived lack of support from Families SA and other services.
- Experience of abuse in care.
- Birth parents having subsequent children who remained in the care of parents.

3.2 Connections

A child or young person in care having significant connections to trustworthy adults helps to build resilience and provides the necessary consistent emotional support. In 182 cases (94 per cent) the panel was able to identify at least one significant

⁷ Individualised packages of care are agreements made with non-government alternative care providers for a specified program of services and alternative care, which are used for children with high and complex needs.

adult in the child's life.⁸ The significant adult was their mother and/or father, carer(s) or a relative who provided emotional support to the child or young person. This is a consistent result obtained over the last four years.

For the remaining 12 children and young people (six per cent) the panel could not identify significant connections for them outside of their siblings and/or Families SA. Of particular concern was that four of this group were adolescents approaching independence.

For the most part, good efforts, and in some cases exceptional efforts were made to ensure family contact was maintained. However, for 20 children and young people (10 per cent) there were significant difficulties in maintaining family contact. The difficulties comprised of:

- Two children who did not want contact with birth parents, and this was respected by Families SA.
- In ten cases there was evidence that the birth parents' engagement in contact was inconsistent. In an additional eight cases, the whereabouts of an individual parent was unknown.
- In two cases information was presented that indicated carers were resistant to the child's contact with birth parents.
- There were safety concerns for two children if family contact was to occur.

The connections between siblings in separate placements remain an issue. A variety of contributing factors were noted. The separation of multiple siblings across regions has contributed to a lack of formal contact arrangements for children. In two cases, it was reported that the children experience difficult sibling relationships and there had been little effort to facilitate repair.

Children and young people were supported to participate in a variety of activities that promoted social connections, including, but not limited to:

- Sporting pursuits
- CREATE Foundation (the non-government organisation for children and young people in care)
- Youth groups
- Church
- Performing and visual arts.

⁸ In 2010-11, 92 per cent of children and young people reviewed had at least one significant adult in their lives.

Seven children and young people received mentor support to participate in social and recreational activities.

3.3 Cultural identity and connections

Fifty-nine cases of Aboriginal children and young people were reviewed, or 30 per cent of the total number of reviews audited. Thirty-three Aboriginal children (56 per cent of the sub-group) were placed with their extended family or with Aboriginal carers at the time of their annual review.⁹ All but one of the remaining 26 children and young people resided in non-Aboriginal placements – either foster care or residential care. In five of these cases, the child had been placed with a non-Aboriginal carer prior to confirmation of the child's Aboriginality.

As mentioned in section 2.5, a Principal Aboriginal Consultant or Aboriginal Senior Project Officer was present at annual reviews for Aboriginal children and young people, except in two cases. In all but five of 59 cases, there was evidence that cultural consultation had occurred to inform case planning.

In 47 of the 59 cases (80 per cent), there was evidence that the children and young people were provided with information about their cultural heritage and 42 of the 59 children and young people had opportunity to engage in activities to promote their cultural identity (this included children and young people placed with non-Aboriginal carers). The development and application of a cultural identity plan was inconsistent across the Families SA offices. While some offices indicated that identity planning had commenced, a number of offices acknowledged that identity plans had not been developed. Those offices not using plans indicated that social workers needed assistance to develop and complete the plans.

In seven of the 25 cases of non-Aboriginal placements, children and young people had been identified by their birth parents as Aboriginal only months prior to the annual review. Therefore, there was little information available at the time of the review but in all cases, the review outcome was to explore the child or young person's heritage and cultural connections.

In 29 cases (49 per cent), developing the Aboriginal Life Story Book had commenced. In an additional 13 cases, it was reported that due to the child's age and/or their living in community, a cultural Life Story Book had not been provided and/or commenced. Of those children and young people in non-Aboriginal placements (excluding one living independently) 19 of the 25 children and young people had an Aboriginal Life Story Book. However, only 13 of this group had a life story book specific to their clan group.

⁹ In 2010-11, 62 per cent of the Aboriginal children were placed with their extended family or with Aboriginal carers.

Twelve children and young people of refugee backgrounds had their cases reviewed. All but one of the children were placed with their extended family or with carers within their culture. One young person resides outside of his cultural community. His placement reflects his wishes and respects the bond between him and his carer. The young person is actively supported to have regular contact with his family who continue to reside in his home country. All of the children had connections with their cultural communities, jointly supported by Families SA, school and their communities.

3.4 Participation

Thirteen children and young people (seven per cent) were supported to attend the annual review.¹⁰ Additionally 36 children and young people (18 per cent) participated by completing the survey form¹¹ and two (one per cent) participated via teleconference. This is the same level of direct participation achieved last year.¹² Graph 4 illustrates the children's means of participation in their annual reviews.

One office has made the distinction between 'administrative' and 'full' reviews. The active participation of others is only sought for those deemed 'full' reviews. The distribution of survey forms to facilitate the active participation of children and young people remains an inconsistent practice across Families SA.

It was reported that surveys were distributed to children and young people and their carers in another 59 cases but not returned at the time of the annual review. Two offices reported that a case work assistant (or social work aide) routinely distributed annual review surveys to children and young people, their carers and birth family via a mail out in preparation for the annual review meeting. On a few occasions, in separate offices, senior Families SA staff questioned whether surveys had been distributed because some carers whom they expected to hear from had not replied.

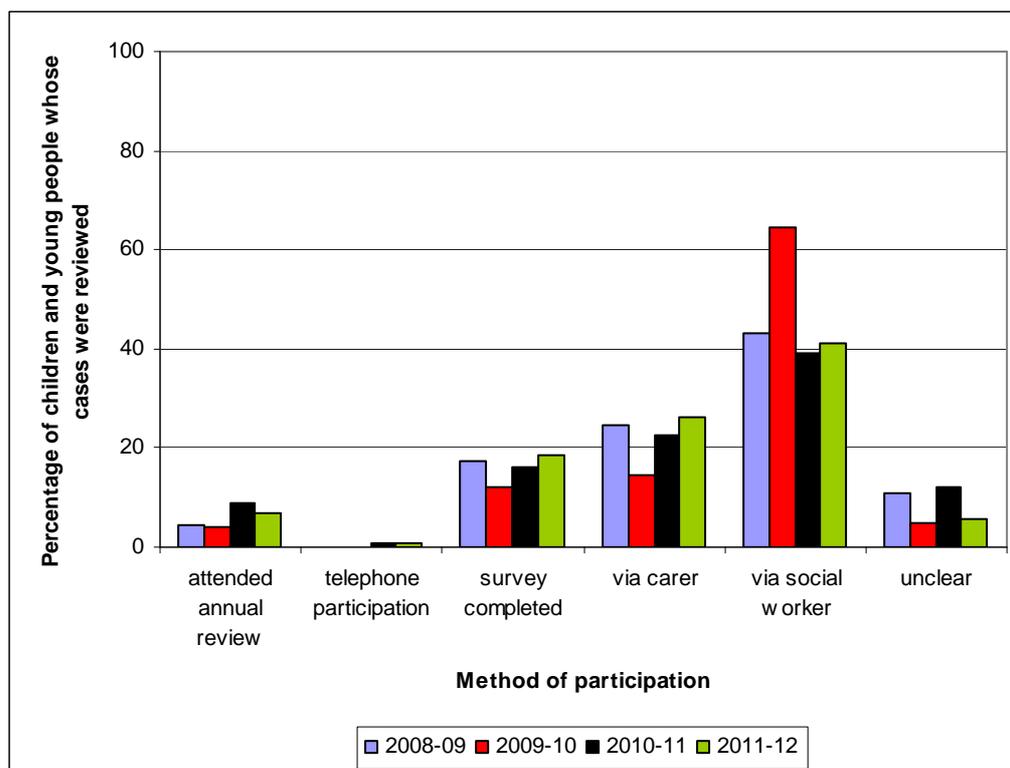
There were a number of cases in which it was acknowledged that the child and carers had not been told about the annual reviews and not provided the opportunity to contribute.

¹⁰ In 2010-11, 22 children and young people (nine per cent) attended their annual review.

¹¹ Guardianship Annual Review, Appendix B – Child or Young Person Survey, available to all case workers.

¹² In 2010-11, 26 per cent of children and young people whose cases were reviewed, directly participated in their annual review. In 2009-10, it was 16 per cent, and in 2008-09, it was 21 per cent.

Graph 4. Child's means of participation in annual review



In the absence of the child's active voice, GCYP considered the role of others to represent the child's views in the annual review. Of the 143 children and young people who did not actively participate in the annual review, the social worker spoke in detail about the child or young person's involvement in case decisions and demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the child's views in 81 cases (42 per cent of the total reviews audited). In this reporting period there was a greater engagement of carers.

There was strong evidence that the carers were engaged in case planning and decision-making in 51 cases (26 per cent of the total reviews audited) and similar to last year, this did not appear limited to cases of very young children or those with limited capacity to participate in decision making.

The voice of the child was absent or unclear in a total of 11 cases (six per cent), for a number of reasons. Of significant concern were seven instances of the allocated social worker not demonstrating knowledge of the child's or young person's views, often due to a lack of contact with the child or young person. There were also two cases in which it was reported that the carers prevented or blocked independent contact between the child and social worker or refused to engage with

Families SA. Another two children are separately residing interstate with their long-term carers and there is no direct contact between the children and Families SA.

3.5 Safety

During the audits of annual reviews there was significant safety concerns raised for four adolescents. Two of these young people were reported to have attempted suicide and/or expressed suicidal ideations within the previous year. The remaining two young people were exposed to threats of harm and abusive phone calls from a birth parent. In each of these two cases, the birth parent was considered to be 'hounding' the young person and placement. These matters had been reported to police.

In another 19 cases, safety for children and young people could not be confirmed, or confidently evaluated, due to insufficient or conflicting information.

3.6 Interagency collaboration

There was evidence of strong interagency collaboration in 96 cases (49 per cent of all cases, and 74 per cent of cases requiring interagency collaboration) to enhance service delivery and ultimately improve outcomes for the children and young people in care.¹³ However, there were only seven cases in which an external service provider or agency actively contributed to the child's or young person's annual review. They were from Relative and Kinship Care, Disability Services, Education (regional office) and a youth counselling service. Six cases (three per cent) were assessed as having weak interagency collaboration and the success of interagency collaboration was unclear in another 25 cases (13 per cent). In 67 cases (35 per cent) Families SA reported that no other agency was involved in the child or young person's life and that interagency collaboration was not needed.

3.7 Education

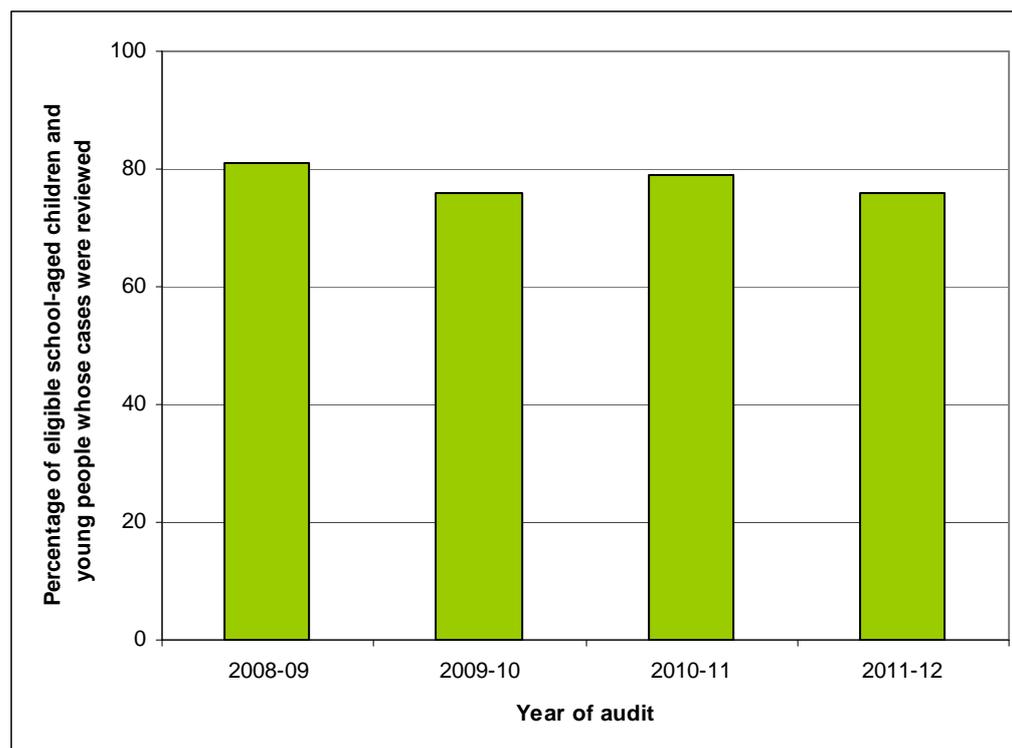
The annual reviews highlighted some great examples of children and young people being encouraged and supported to participate in educational and extra-curricular activities to achieve their full potential. One hundred and fifty children and young people were of school-age and attending a public primary or secondary school. Seventy-six per cent of them had current Individual Education Plans documented on their files.¹⁴ For 36 school-age children (24 per cent) there was no plan on file, the previous year's plan had expired or the Families SA office was awaiting a response from the child's school to convene a meeting. Graph 5

¹³ In 2010-11, there was evidence of strong interagency collaboration in 41 per cent of cases.

¹⁴ In 2010-11, 79 per cent of school-age children reviewed had Individual Education Plans documented on their files. There is no requirement for independent schools to develop an Individual Education Plan in conjunction with Families SA.

illustrates the number of current Individual Education Plans over the last three years.

Graph 5. Individual Education Plans current at annual review



3.8 Health and Disability

All children and young people in care can expect a minimum level of casework service to ensure their safety, stability, health and wellbeing. In addition to that minimum level of service, children and young people may require supplementary assessments and services to meet their individualised needs.

Eighty-four per cent, or 163 children and young people whose cases were reviewed were receiving standard health services to meet their needs, and specific health and disability services, where necessary, to meet additional individual needs. For the remaining 31 children and young people there were numerous issues, and at times more than one issue, impacting upon their needs being met:

- Baseline medical and/or psychological assessments to inform identification of needs and case planning had not been undertaken in nine cases.
- Previous annual review outcomes recommending baseline assessments had not been implemented in three cases.

- Evidence that previous recommendations from assessments were not implemented in five cases.
- Two children were identified as requiring assessments by the Child Development Unit but were on a waiting list.
- Six children with disabilities were not receiving active support from Disability Services; five of whom were awaiting allocation of a worker.
- Five children and young people were reported to have mental health issues, however only two had been assessed.
- Four children had been referred to CAMHS and were awaiting allocation.
- Concerns were expressed for the health of five children and young people who were reported to be significantly overweight.
- In one case a carer was reported to lack insight into the impact of early childhood trauma upon a child's development and was referred to as 'resistant' to supporting the child to participate in ongoing therapy.
- Seven young people were reported as refusing to engage with health services.

3.9 Case worker and practice

All offices openly discussed any identified practice issues in the cases reviewed. There were examples of excellent casework practice, including regular independent face-to-face contact between the child and the social worker according to the child's wishes, extensive research into a child's cultural heritage to strengthen identity and connections, and active advocacy on behalf of the child.

Nonetheless, there were also 13 instances where the social worker had limited knowledge of the child or young person, or was not proactive in working with the child. This resulted in a casework service that only responded to crises and an inability to assess whether the care provided was meeting the needs of the child.

In nine cases of a group of 37 (24 per cent of the sub-group), transition planning for an adolescent approaching independence had not taken place¹⁵.

In 14 of the cases (seven per cent) reviewed there was no current case plan on the child's file. In eight of these cases, the child's circumstances had changed and therefore the expired case plan on the file did not reflect the child's current circumstances.

¹⁵ Thirty-seven young people reviewed were aged 15 years or over and entitled to transition planning, as per the Families SA's *Transition Planning for Young People Leaving Care* policy dated June 2007.

There were 35 children and young people (18 per cent) who were allocated a social worker but either had less than the expected monthly contact or had only been allocated to that worker for less than three months. Nine of these 35 cases had been assessed for a differential case management response, reducing the level of direct contact dependent on the child's circumstances and assessed needs.¹⁶

There were four children residing interstate. In each of these cases there was irregular phone or email contact between the worker and the carers but no direct contact with the children. In addition, at the time of the review, there were no interstate casework arrangements to facilitate the child to have contact with a child protection agency.

In some of the cases in which the child did not have regular contact with the same case worker, social workers reported a number of difficulties in maintaining regular contact due to the location of the child's placement, a refusal by the child to have contact with the social worker or Families SA and barriers to regular contact created by carers. There were three social workers, each allocated to a number of cases subject to annual reviews in this auditing period, who acknowledged that they had not been able to attend to required case tasks and actions. Two of these workers could not provide sufficient comment regarding the quality of care provided to children due to a lack of contact and lack of knowledge of the child's current, and historical, circumstances.

Nine of the cases (five per cent) reviewed were unallocated to a case worker.

3.10 Quality of the review process

The way in which reviews are conducted is inconsistent across Families SA offices. The panel composition across Families SA offices impacts on the quality of the annual reviews conducted. GCYP has observed engaging and participative annual reviews, often undertaken consistently by the same offices.

Based on our observations, a child's circumstances are discussed and considered in greater detail where there is some level of participation from external service providers and/or independent panel members, and when more than thirty minutes is allocated to the review.

On some occasions the Office noted that annual reviews commenced with a review of the previous year's recommendations and a status report on the progress of implementation of those recommendations. However, this mostly did not occur.

¹⁶ All nine children and young people were receiving formal face-to-face contact once every three months.

Of particular concern this year was evidence in a few cases that previous reviews' recommendations had not been implemented.

3.11 Being in care information

The *Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Care* has been developed to inform children and young people of their rights in care. Families SA, through its endorsement of the *Charter* is also committed to ensuring that these rights are met. Of the 134 children and young people who should have received the *Charter* and had it explained to them, only 90 had (67 per cent of the sub-group, or 46 per cent of the total).¹⁷ Previously, the Office has acknowledged, in discussion with some Families SA offices, that the *Charter*, in its current form, was not culturally appropriate for Aboriginal children and young people living with relative carers in remote communities or former refugee children and young people. These circumstances are not counted among the 134.

Most children and young people in care rely on oral information sharing from their carers and social workers to understand their circumstances. The disrupted family life of children and young people who come into care often means the loss of knowledge of their history, the documents and the photographs and the significant memories and associations that come with them. Life Story Books are regarded as a means to safeguard and make young people's history available to them. The creation and management of a child's Life Story Book requires a sensitive and planned approach.

Thirty-eight per cent of the children and young people whose cases were reviewed had Life Story Books.¹⁸ Graph 6 illustrates the number of children and young people whose cases were reviewed in recent years who had a Life Story Book.

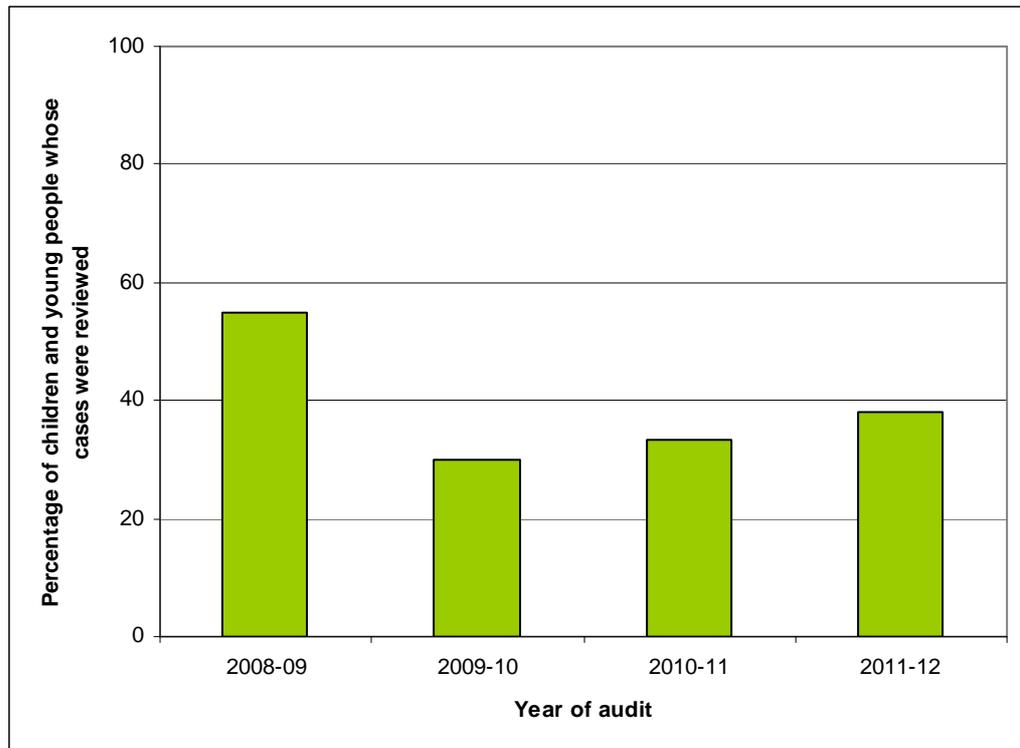
In 44 cases, a Life Story Book was considered not appropriate due to the child's incapacity to understand and contribute. Therefore, almost 40 per cent of children and young people, who could have made use of one, did not have a Life Story Book.

In 27 cases it was reported that in lieu of a Life Story Book, carers maintained photo albums for the children and young people in their care.

¹⁷ In 2010-11, 65 per cent of children and young people reviewed have been provided with, and understood, the *Charter of Rights for Children and Young People*.

¹⁸ In 2010-11, 33 per cent of children and young people reviewed had Life Story Books.

Graph 6. Children and Young People with Life Story Books



3.12 Identified systems issues

Case workers and supervisors were willing to discuss systemic issues. In addition to the unallocation of almost five per cent of cases, reportedly due to inadequate resourcing, the following issues were identified in this reporting period:

- Aboriginal children are not consistently identified specific to their clan group(s). This prevents accurate planning to promote ongoing cultural connections and culturally appropriate activities, such as language classes, camps and visits to community. Also, the inconsistent development of Cultural Identity Plans further hinders Aboriginal children and young people's connections to their family, community and culture.
- Some young people make their own decisions about placements, including returning to live with their parents, from whom they have previously been removed. In most circumstances 'self-placement' has occurred without Families SA's approval and is not considered a placement. These situations are 'risk-managed' and the young person's safety and wellbeing

relies strongly on the relationship between the young person and their social worker.

- Some children remain in emergency accommodation with rotating carers for longer than 12 months due to delays in securing therapeutic residential care or appropriate foster care.

Systemic issues identified in previous years that remain current are:

- New family-based placements are particularly difficult to secure for children and young people, and not necessarily just for those with a history of placement instability or complex needs. A lack of family-based placements has resulted in younger children being placed in residential care, against recommendations by psychologists. Additionally, a lack of regionally based placements has resulted in the relocation of children and young people from country regions to Adelaide, causing significant upheaval and disconnection.
- A lack of culturally appropriate placements has resulted in Aboriginal children being placed in non-Aboriginal foster or residential care arrangements. In a number of cases very young Aboriginal children have been placed in a non-Aboriginal foster placement and reportedly formed an attachment with their carer. The child's removal from that placement is likely to cause significant emotional harm.
- The placement of additional (unrelated) children into foster care families is sometimes done without consulting other offices that are responsible of other children in the home. In four situations, it was reported that going over the agreed number of children with that family ('placement exceed') put a child's placement at risk.
- Large sibling groups, separated across numerous placements, have varying success with meaningful sibling contact arrangements. Sibling contact had been impeded by a number of factors, including uncooperative relationships between carers, inactive involvement of a social worker to facilitate, poor coordination across Families SA offices and the exclusion of children and young people in decisions about contact.
- There is instability of care arrangements for some children and young people due to the ageing of their long-term carers (aged in their late 60s to early 80s) and without an identified alternative care arrangement.
- A lack of transition planning for children and young people approaching independence (see 3.9) is likely to result in poor outcomes for young people leaving care.

4 Conclusion

The purpose of annual reviews is to determine the quality of a child or young person's care arrangements and to discuss their immediate and longer term ambitions and needs. The process should include reviewing the previous plan, reflecting on progress made and the impact of actions undertaken. This reflection then strengthens the planning for the year ahead and is integral to the ongoing assessment of, and response to, the child's needs and aspirations. Good annual reviews have the active participation of the child, their carers, external agencies and where appropriate the birth family. The Office of the Guardian's audit found that:

- Of the 194 children and young people whose cases were reviewed, 167 (86 per cent) were in stable, long-term placements.
- Of the children and young people whose cases were reviewed, 182 (94 per cent) had at least one significant adult in their lives.
- Twelve children and young people (6 per cent), including four adolescents approaching independence, did not have any significant connections beyond Families SA.
- Fifty-nine of the total reviews were for Aboriginal children and 33 (56 per cent) were placed with their extended family or with Aboriginal carers.
- Forty-nine children and young people (25 per cent) whose cases were reviewed directly participated in their annual review, either by attending (7 per cent) or by completing a survey (18 per cent). Of the 143 children and young people who did not actively participate, in 81 cases the social worker spoke in detail about the child or young person's involvement in case decisions and demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the child's views.
- In 11 cases (6 per cent) the child or young person did not have a voice in case planning or annual reviews.
- Of the 194 children and young people whose cases were reviewed, 171 (88 per cent) were confidently considered safe and reported to feel safe.

- Of the 150 children and young people who were of school age and attending a public primary or secondary school, 114 (76 per cent) had current Individual Education Plans documented on their files.
- One hundred and sixty three children and young people (84 per cent) whose cases were reviewed were receiving standard health services and, where necessary, specific health and disability services to meet their needs.
- Forty-four children and young people (23 per cent) whose cases were reviewed did not have regular contact with the same case worker. Thirty-five (18 per cent) who were allocated a social worker received less than the recommended monthly face-to-face contact, including nine children who were receiving a differential case management response. Nine children (5 per cent) were not allocated to a case worker.
- Nine of the 37 young people aged 15 to 17 years did not have transition plans.
- Of the 134 children and young people who had the capacity to understand, 90 (67 per cent) had been provided with, and had explained to them, the *Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Care*.
- Seventy-four children and young people (38 per cent) whose cases were reviewed had a Life Story Book. This included 29 Aboriginal children and young people who have been supported to develop a culturally appropriate Life Story Book.

Based on comparison with the 2010-11 Audit of Annual Reviews it appears that:

- Improvements have been achieved in the following areas
 - stable, long-term placements;
 - children's connections to significant others; and
 - transition planning for adolescents preparing to leave care.

However, the results again indicate that only one in every four children and young people actively participate in annual reviews and a minority of children and young people did not have a voice in their annual review or case planning.

- Similar results to last year have been achieved in the following areas
 - implementation of Individual Education Plans;

- information for children and young people about being in care; and
- placement of Aboriginal children with their extended family or in Aboriginal placements.
- The Office is concerned about results in the following areas
 - a slight decrease in the number of children and young people who have regular contact with the same case worker;
 - a significant number of cases (19) where information about whether a child is safe and feels safe was inadequate; and
 - the persistent lack of engagement in annual reviews of service providers known to the child or young person to inform decision-making and goal setting.

GCYP has provided written feedback to every Families SA office visited in this audit of annual reviews, with a copy provided to the Regional Director. This enables GCYP to monitor the specific issues that arose for each of these offices. In 2012-13 we will continue to focus on the participation of children and young people, the inclusion of others in decision-making and consistent good practice in conducting annual reviews.

Appendix A – Families SA offices visited for the purpose of auditing annual reviews

<i>Office</i>	<i>Number of reviews attended in 2011-12¹⁹</i>
Adelaide	0
Ceduna	1
Coober Pedy	12
Elizabeth	11
Gawler	15
Limestone Coast	12
Marion	5
Mt Barker	30
Murraylands	4
North Eastern	6
Onkaparinga	8
Port Augusta	0
Port Lincoln	0
Port Pirie	0
Refugee Program	12
Riverland	22
Salisbury	15
Whyalla	24
Woodville	17

¹⁹ On six occasions GCYP declined invitations to attend scheduled annual reviews due to prior commitments with other offices. In addition, some offices may have conducted annual reviews without informing GCYP of the opportunity to attend.