

NEWSLETTER

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The Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People advocates for and promotes the best interests of young people and children under the guardianship or custody of the Minister.

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Read to Me

Those quiet moments spent reading with a baby or toddler may be more than just a pleasant memory for you both. Research here and overseas has repeatedly shown that reading with a young child is a powerful predictor of their future success in reading and writing and in education generally.

Raising Literacy Australia has long been in the business of getting books into the hands of young children and their families and their most recent venture, *Read to Me*, has a special focus on children who are in state care.

Starting October 2015 all children in care from birth to five years have received a package of books carefully selected for their age group and delivered to their door.

'Families SA has been very supportive while keeping children's details confidential,' explains Raising Literacy Australia's Michelle Littleboy.

'They let us know the ages of children, and the number of packs and then coordinated the deliveries to the right addresses.

'After the first delivery, we then provide a top-up pack every few months and, of course, starter packs to new children coming into care.

'The next round of deliveries will be in March,' she said.

Many carers and foster parents have written to express their appreciation.

'My husband and I are foster parents and today our foster son received a pack of books from yourselves. We just wanted to say thank you and what an awesome initiative. He was delighted to receive them all and immediately sat and read/had them read to him with/by his older brothers. It was lovely to see them all enjoying the new books.'

'We've had many phone calls from grateful carers and foster parents too and even some happy tears,' said Michelle.

'The project is funded by the South Australian Government with great support from Variety the Children's Charity of South Australia and Cochrane's Transport. Support from children's publishers across Australia has helped us to buy books very economically.'

Raising Literacy Australia is confident that they are in this for the long run.

'We will really see the true benefit of this project when this generation of children are starting to sit down to read with their own children,' said Michelle.

Raising Literacy Australia is the overarching organisation best known by The Little Big Book Club Program. Information on its variety of initiatives can be found at its [website](http://www.gryp.sa.gov.au).





Amanda Shaw
Guardian

Letter from the Guardian for Children and Young People

Only five weeks into my new position as Guardian and already I've lost count of the number of times I've been asked 'what is your vision?' Having been with the Office for eight years as the Senior Advocate, working with the remarkable Pam Simmons, it's probably not surprising that my vision is the same one I have shared with the staff team in that time, that our work continues to be *about* children and young people in care, *for* those children and *involve* their views and experiences.

We want a child protection system that works for each of the very diverse group of children and young people it serves. We want a child protection system that makes decisions based on the child's needs, rather than what the system is currently capable or willing to provide.

We want to see the active participation by the broadest range of concerned and knowledgeable people in decision-making, planning and action. We need children, families, carers and other agencies such as health, housing, education and disability working collaboratively and sharing the responsibility to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people growing up in care.

Child protection workers provide a critical and significant role for children in care; children and young people have told us so many times. Lack of morale, stress and fatigue amongst child protection and out of home care workers can translate into poor services for young clients. Our best workers are doing good work in spite of high caseloads, increasingly complex cases (and multiple complex cases on the same caseload) and the unallocation of cases due to insufficient resources.

Having Senior Practitioners and Supervisors with case work responsibilities – in effect a caseload – diminishes their ability to support workers, to provide a focus on continuous practice improvement and reflective supervision.

We have heard and seen children and young people thriving in family-based placements yet our state falls back to less satisfactory options like residential and emergency care more than other states in Australia. Why are we unable to attract and retain good foster carers while other states continue to do so?

We need to see a spectrum of placement options so that workers and children together can find a placement that meets the child's needs. Aboriginal children need dedicated and consistent support to be genuinely connected with their culture and communities.

As this office has done for ten years, we will continue to promote the voice of children and young people in our work and within other agencies. We will continue to monitor what is happening in residential care and the Adelaide Youth Training Centre and audit the annual reviews of children and young people in long-term care. We will continue to find examples of great practice and positive experiences for children and to celebrate the achievements of young people themselves. We need to harness those examples to demonstrate what can be done and share those success stories with others.

In 2016, I'm looking forward to the tabling of the revised *Charter of Rights for Children and Young People* in Parliament in February and rolling it out with a new range of promotional materials. This year Parliament will be deliberating on the Youth Justice Administration Bill which will bring substantial changes. I'm also looking forward to our contribution to Commissioner Nyland's considerations and ultimately her recommendations on improvements for the child protection system, in particular by contributing the child's perspective and monitoring progress.

It's going to a big year!

We want a child protection system that makes decisions based on the child's needs, rather than what the system is currently capable or willing to provide.

What's been done

September 2016 – February 2016

The [2014-15 Guardian's Annual Report](#) was tabled in late October, followed by the release of the [Year in Review](#).

The report on what we learnt about the circumstances for children under guardianship of the Minister from the [2014-15 audit of annual reviews](#) was released in September. This report is a good indication of the circumstances of the group as a whole, the quality of casework practice and systemic strengths and weaknesses.

The Charter of Rights for children and young people in care was reviewed in 2015 and some important changes made to the text, following feedback from children and young people. [See p.5 for the story of the review.] The revised text will be tabled in Parliament in February. New graphic designs to accompany the new text will be released in the first half of 2016.

The Charter of Rights Implementation Committee had its final 2015 meeting in November with an informative presentation by Kate Cameron, Churchill Fellow, on out of home care for young people with disabilities

The consultation on a model charter of rights specific to detention facilities was completed in October. In December, the Minister for Communities and Social Inclusion accepted the Charter of Rights for Children and Young People Detained in Youth Justice Facilities. We will follow its promotion and monitoring in the Adelaide Youth Training Centre.

A [written submission](#) was made to the Legislative Council Inquiry into Access to the Education System for Students with Disabilities emphasising the special circumstances for students in out of home care or in detention.

A [submission](#) was made to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs inquiry into the educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

In the six months, July to December 2015 there were 64 requests for intervention about children under guardianship, involving 76 children. The Senior Advocate audited 98 annual reviews for children under long-term orders and Advocates made ten official visits to residential or youth justice facilities.

A survey of our Information Service subscribers in December drew 358 responses to the question 'how would you spend extra money on child protection?' The [survey report](#) showed early intervention and family support as the most popular option by a great margin.



 If you would like to be added to the Guardian's Information Service, please email the [Communications Officer](#) with the words 'please add me to the service' or something similar in the subject line or body text.



In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – Article 30

If you are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander you have the right to know about your cultural and spiritual identity and your community.

Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Care

Honouring connection to culture and community in Indigenous young people

The Guardian's Office is developing new ways to understand and measure how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are being supported in residential care.

Almost 30 per cent of young people in State care in South Australia are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, more than ten times the rate of their representation in the general community. The multiple disadvantages faced by the Indigenous community translates into particular challenges for providers of residential care and supporting strong cultural and community connections offers a way forward for young people and the Indigenous community as a whole.

Focussing on these challenges, the Guardian's Office recently released the [Literature Review – Residential Care for Aboriginal Children and Young People](#) (August 2015). This flagged the need for a set of qualitative performance indicators to help monitor and evaluate how the care provided supports the right of the young residents to participate in and benefit from their Aboriginal culture and community.

The Guardian's Office is developing those culture and community indicators now.

The new indicators will help Advocates monitor how residential care services support the right of the young residents to participate in and benefit from their Aboriginal culture and community connections. They will complement the Office's [current monitoring practice](#).

They will also be useful for house managers and staff, complementing in a practical way existing policies and activities such as *Aboriginal Identity Planning* and other standard practices such as annual case reviews.

What the Guardian's Office and residential care staff learn from applying the new indicators will be included in the reports we provide to houses and Families SA and to advocate for policy and practice developments.

The new Indicators will focus on how a residential service:

- helps the young person to understand their current situation and supports their involvement in making decisions about their life
- supports access to their culture and community
- uses culturally appropriate tools and service methodologies and
- involves a range of carers and other service providers in meeting the young person's needs.

Applying the indicators, Advocates will ask young people directly about their contact with culture and community. They will look at how the house applies the culturally relevant policy and operational expectations of that service provider and the residential care system and they will assess cultural aspects of the house's physical and social environment.

Focussing on the situation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in this way will help the Guardian to meet her statutory obligation to 'promote the best interests of children under the guardianship, or in the custody, of the Minister, and in particular those in alternative care.'

The Office is discussing aspects of the new indicators with a variety of stakeholders.

The indicators will be included as a part of the information package that accompanies the *Residential Care Self-evaluation Survey* in June 2016.

For further information about the development of the new Culture and Community Indicators, please contact Alan Fairley, GCYP Senior Policy Officer, at alan.fairley@gcyp.sa.gov.au.

New look Charter of Rights for 2016



At the [Charter's launch](#) at the Adelaide Zoo in 2006, then Minister for Families and Communities, Jay Weatherill congratulated the children and young people, carers and professionals whose work created the Charter.

He said that children and young people in care 'need to know they can expect to be treated well and cared for properly while they are under guardianship.

'It also is crucial for them to know they have options if something goes wrong.

'The Charter is a great way of telling them this and preventing problems such as abuse,' he said.

Since the launch, over 60 government, non-government and commercial organisations have endorsed the Charter and applied it in their work. Over 200 Charter Champions within those organisations have taken on the responsibility to promote the Charter and support young people to make their rights a reality.

The Guardian's office has made the Charter the centre of its monitoring and advocacy and hundreds of posters and thousands of booklets and other items promoting young people's rights have been distributed.

After ten years, the Charter is due for review and throughout 2015, the team at the Guardian's office has consulted with young people and adult stakeholders about the content of the Charter and how the messages about rights can best be conveyed.

'The young people we spoke to were happy with most of the content and wording of the original Charter, but we will be proposing to the Minister some small but significant tweaks based on what they suggested,' explained Guardian Amanda Shaw.

'The new materials that are being developed to coincide with the revised Charter will focus on rights in action and encouraging young people and adults to use the rights to discuss and resolve needs and issues as they arise.

'The revised Charter will also offer the opportunity for endorsed organisations to review their endorsement of the Charter and to re-commit to it.

'We are very grateful to the 27 young people who worked with us on the review and to the staff of Key Assets, Families SA in Pt Augusta and Mt Barker and CreateSA who made the consultations happen.

'The new-look Charter is a tribute to them.'

If the Minister approves of the revised Charter it will be tabled at a sitting of Parliament early in 2016.

[Children and young people in care] need to know that they can expect to be treated well and cared for properly while they are under guardianship.'

Jay Weatherill



Advocate Jodie Evans and young people warm up for the Charter of Rights consultation in Port Augusta in April 2015

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Art meets rights at Tandanya

To accompany the revised Charter of Rights to be tabled in Parliament early this year will be a new set of posters and other materials. Guardian's Office Advocates, graphic designers and an Indigenous consultant met with a small group of young Aboriginal people in care to discuss what would appeal and get the rights message across.



'Huge thanks to the young people for their great ideas and enthusiasm on the day. Also to Melissa from our office, Tony from CAMHS (Indigenous consultant to the project), designers Sue and Chris and to Patrick.'

Jodie Evans, Senior Advocate



There was robust discussion and some powerful guidance for the designers:

- handprints with sayings inside of them
- hand drawn images - they are made by heart, computer generated images are made by nothing
- circles – maroon, darker and lighter (circles keep on going, squares have stopping points)
- border in black
- rainbow serpent around the poster
- brush strokes in different shades of the same colour
- strong dark background with white outlines of design to stand out
- must have animals – Kangaroo, Wombat, Emu, Lizard, Black Swan, Ibis
- how about using symbols (examples : the Meeting Place, the Sitting Place, Women Gathering, Men Gathering).
- use textures like sand, ocean, rock, water, nature



A chance encounter with Adnyamathanha and Pitjantjatjara artist Patrick Fergusson who had an exhibition at Tandanya when the consultation was taking place gave the young people and the designers a the opportunity to speak to a practicing Aboriginal artist. Patrick explained that he works from found native timbers that he turns into traditional artefacts featuring designs handed down to him by his Elders. 'Passing things on is what culture is about – young people are our future,' he said.

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