



# Community Services

Programs, activities and initiatives



Family &  
Community Services  
Community Services



## MISSION STATEMENT

**Our purpose is to  
protect children and  
young people most  
at risk of abuse and  
neglect.**

Community Services is a division of the Department of Family & Community Services (FACS). The Department delivers services to some of the most disadvantaged individuals, families and communities in NSW. FACS enables or assists vulnerable people to participate fully in social and economic life and build stronger, more sustainable inclusive communities.

Community Services' main focus is on supporting vulnerable families and keeping children and young people safe from abuse and neglect. We work closely with other government departments, non-government organisations (NGOs) and the community to achieve this.

### **Divisions of FACS**

Aboriginal Housing Office  
Ageing, Disability and Home  
Care (ADHC)  
Community Services  
Housing NSW  
Women NSW

## Our STAKEHOLDERS

- Children and young people in need of care and protection
- Families and communities in need of help and support
- Non-government service providers and local, state and Commonwealth governments
- Research organisations, universities and students
- The media and the public

## Our FOCUS

We provide and fund services that help make communities more resilient. We also invest in prevention and early intervention strategies to help families deal with issues before they become crises.

Our key responsibilities are:

- protect children and young people at risk of significant harm
- provide and fund early intervention services
- fund out-of-home care services for children and young people who can no longer live at home
- fund community development and provide support to strengthen families and communities.

## Our VALUES

### **Integrity**

We are honest, fair and professional in our interactions with each other and the public.

### **Trust**

We build relationships based on mutual respect.

### **Service**

We work hard to improve the lives of families in NSW.

### **Accountability**

We act responsibly and are transparent in our dealings with the public.





# Our WORK

**Community Services programs and activities are based on objectives and performance targets in the NSW 2021 Plan, Community Services Strategic Plan 2012-2015 and FACS corporate planning documents\*.**

We work to reduce the number of children and young people in the community who are vulnerable to abuse and neglect. Our focus is on helping families live safely together at home. If this is not possible, we work to ensure children in care have the opportunities to create a successful future.

Our vision is to build a strong, flexible and integrated child protection system. This involves:

- focusing on prevention and

early intervention services for those who need it most

- improving the way we work with families and the Court
- helping parents to reduce risks to their children
- giving kids in care the chance to reach their full potential in stable homes
- developing a seamless service system that works for families.

*\*Copies available at  
[www.community.nsw.gov.au](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au)*



## KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE

In NSW, the safety and wellbeing of children and young people is the shared responsibility of parents and families, supported by the community, government and the non-government sector.

### **Statutory child protection**

Community Services aims to ensure children and young people are safe following intervention. We work on the most serious cases of abuse and neglect, and may place children and young people in care to keep them safe from harm.

### **Child Protection Helpline**

The Child Protection Helpline receives reports 24 hours, seven days a week from community members and mandatory reporters about children and young people who may be at risk of significant harm due to physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect.

The Helpline assesses these reports to determine whether the child reaches the statutory reporting level of risk of significant harm. These children are then reported to Community Services. If the risk falls below this threshold, other government agencies and NGOs are supported to work with the children and their families.

***Child Protection Helpline: 132 111***

### **Joint Investigation Response Teams**

Joint Investigation Response Teams (JIRT) bring together Community Services, NSW Police and Ministry of Health to respond to allegations of child abuse that may involve criminality.

### **Protecting Aboriginal children**

Aboriginal children and young people are over-represented in the child protection system. To reduce this, Community Services has implemented or assisted with a number of initiatives:

- **Protecting Aboriginal Children Together (PACT)** – focuses on practical ways of working with Aboriginal communities and organisations to determine the best ways of keeping Aboriginal children safe
- **Aboriginal Intensive Family Based Services (IFBS)** – provides time-limited, home-based, intensive support for Aboriginal families where children are at risk of entering care or are in care
- **Safe Families** – part of the Interagency Plan to tackle Aboriginal child sexual assault through community development, child protection, early intervention and prevention, and risk reduction.



## SUPPORTING CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE

Children who experience serious neglect and abuse and can't live safely at home, and those whose families are unable to care for them are placed in out-of-home care (OOHC). This may be with relatives (kinship care) or foster parents, in residential care or independent living arrangements.

In 2011–12, the transfer of out-of-home care service provision to the non-government sector got underway. Community Services is working with the non-government sector to create a stronger service system with the right mix of services at a sustainable cost.

## Children and young people in care

Children and young people in care do best in stable, well-functioning placements where educational, health, social, cultural and emotional needs are met.

We use permanency planning wherever possible so children have long-term stability. We also aim to place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with extended family or members of the wider Aboriginal community to help maintain culture, in line with the legislative *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles*.

## Supporting carers

Improved support for carers strengthens the quality and stability of placements and supports better outcomes for children in care. We fund and work with the following organisations to deliver support, training, counselling, advocacy, resources and advice to carer families across NSW:

- **AbSec** – supports and advocates for carers of Aboriginal children and establishes Aboriginal carer support groups across NSW
- **Connecting Carers NSW** – offers structured peer support, training and network activities, and a 24-hour carer telephone support line



- **Link Up (NSW)** – works with Aboriginal people who were separated from their families as children
- **CREATE** – Australia's peak body representing the voices of children and young people in care.

### **Adoption and permanent care**

Children who cannot live safely at home need another permanent family arrangement to provide stability. Adoption provides the greatest opportunity for permanency. We continue working on removing barriers to adoption and increasing the number of adoptions of children in long-term care. We provide adoption services within four programs:

- out-of-home care
- local adoption and permanent care, including special needs, intra-familial and special-case adoption
- inter-country adoption
- post-adoption.

### **Improving education, health and mental health outcomes**

- Under the OOHCHS Screening and Assessment Pathway, all children and young people entering statutory care must receive a comprehensive health and development assessment within 30 days. Led by

the Ministry of Health, this includes health screening, development of health management plans and health service intervention.

- The Foster Child Health Care card offers cheaper prescription medicine and bulk-billed general practitioner visits, and reduces out-of-hospital medical expenses.
- Individual education plans are developed in partnership with the Department of Education & Communities.
- The Teenage Education Payment boosts participation in education or training for teens in care aged 16–17 years. This annual payment of \$6,000 helps carers pay for tutoring and other education-related expenses for the young person.

### **Aftercare services**

Transitioning to independence is a priority under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, and Community Services is working with the Commonwealth government to improve outcomes for young care leavers. We help them to find accommodation, undertake education and training, access income support and healthcare, and receive referrals to counselling services.

## INTERVENTION

We help families in NSW by providing targeted support for vulnerable families. Early intervention strategies help families who are struggling and prevent problems from escalating, and our programs aim to support children's age-appropriate development without ongoing involvement with the child.

### Brighter Futures

Delivered by non-government agencies, Brighter Futures provides services to families with children under nine years of age who are vulnerable to domestic violence, parental drug and alcohol misuse and/or mental health issues, and parental intellectual disability or learning difficulties that impact on parenting. Services include case management, structured home visits, group parenting programs and quality children's services.

### Strengthening Families

The Strengthening Families program helps families who are the subject of a risk of significant harm report to Community Services, with children under nine years of age or who are expecting a baby and who face problems. The program aims to

help stop family problems from getting worse so that children can remain living safely at home.

### Early Intervention and Placement Prevention (EIPP)

The EIPP program forms part of an integrated system of funded early intervention and placement prevention services aimed at reducing the likelihood of children and young people entering or remaining in the child protection system and out-of-home care system.





## BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Community Services coordinates a range of community and family programs. We oversee the delivery of services that help strengthen families, support young people and help families experiencing issues, such as drug and alcohol abuse and family violence.

### **Alcohol and drug abuse**

The Community Services Clinical Issues Unit helps caseworkers access expert knowledge, training, resources and support about drugs and alcohol and other clinical issues.

### **Community Builders**

Community Builders is a funding program to strengthen communities across NSW, with a focus on disadvantaged groups. This is in response to evidence community strengthening is an effective way of reducing inequality and disadvantage.

### **Family and domestic violence**

- The NSW Domestic Violence Line receives calls involving violence against women and children.  
*NSW Domestic Violence Line: 1800 65 64 63.*
- The Integrated Domestic and Family Violence Services Program funds six projects to

prevent escalation of domestic and family violence, and includes case management and coordination.

- Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV) is specialist domestic violence services operating in 21 locations across NSW. SHLV supports women and children escaping violence to remain safely in their own home.

### **Families NSW**

A whole-of-government prevention and early intervention strategy for families expecting a child or with children aged up to eight years. Provided by FACS, Ministry of Health and the Department of Education & Communities, with local government and NGOs, Families NSW funds supported playgroups, community capacity-building projects and the free Triple P (Positive Parenting Program).

### **Aboriginal Child, Youth and Family Strategy**

A prevention and early intervention strategy for Aboriginal families expecting a child or with children aged up to five years.

### **Aboriginal Child and Family Centres**

Part of the Indigenous Early Childhood Development National Partnership Agreement, and provide integrated services tailored to the needs of local Aboriginal families.



## CREATING A VIBRANT AND SUSTAINABLE OUT-OF-HOME CARE SECTOR IN NSW

To help vulnerable children and families, the NSW Government is transitioning the management of statutory out-of-home care to non-government agencies.

This transition will be implemented over the next five to 10 years to ensure a sustainable out-of-home care system to better meet the needs of children and families into the future. This will allow Community Services to focus on the most vulnerable families and provide support to help prevent more children going into care.

This significant reform will establish a sustainable non-government out-of-home care sector to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people in care in NSW.

### **Transition partners**

The transition is led by the Ministerial Advisory Group and includes government and non-government partners. It reports to the Minister for Family & Community Services.

Transition partners include



FACS, the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat – NSW (AbSec) and the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA).

Transition partners work together to make the transition of out-of-home care to the non-government sector successful and sustainable.

### **Transition Program Office**

The Transition Program Office has been established to implement the transition of statutory out-of-home care and is managed equally by FACS, AbSec and ACWA.

### **Locally managed transition**

Seven Regional Implementation Groups (RIGs) across NSW are the regional driving force to ensure successful transition at a local level. They are co-chaired by regional directors from Community Services and an NGO-nominated representative, with members from all OOHC NGOs providing services in the area.

By working together across NSW, FACS and our partners, AbSec and ACWA, are delivering the vibrant and sustainable sector that children and families need.

### ***Transition News***

If you're interested in keeping up-to-date on the transition, have questions about the transition or wish to subscribe to *Transition News* for regular updates, email "Subscribe" to [OOHCReform@FACS.nsw.gov.au](mailto:OOHCReform@FACS.nsw.gov.au).



# Pathways of Care

## Longitudinal study of children and young people in care



Community Services is undertaking a representative longitudinal study, *Pathways of Care*, that will follow children and young people aged 0–17 years entering out-of-home care for the first time between May 2010–October 2011 and progressed to final Children’s Court orders.

### Study objectives

- Describe the characteristics, child protection history, development and wellbeing of children at the time they enter care.
- Describe services, interventions, transitions and trajectories for such children, including post-restoration, upon adoption and on leaving care at 18.
- Describe the experiences and outcomes of such children.
- Understand the factors that influence outcomes for such children.
- Inform policy and practice to improve outcomes of children in care.

### Data sources

- Community Services child protection and out-of-home care data.
- Record linkage (eg Education, Health, Juvenile Justice, Disability, Housing).
- Ministry of Health Blue Book.

- Primary data collection (carers, children, young people, caseworkers and teachers).

### Timelines

There will be three waves of data collection 18 months apart. Wave 1 fieldwork commenced on May 2011.

### Data analysis and reporting

In addition to the final report presenting the findings from the longitudinal analyses, there will be reports after each wave of data collection. Newsletters will also be distributed regularly to study participants.

### Further information

**W:** [www.community.nsw.gov.au/pathways](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/pathways)

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