



Safe and well:

Supporting families, protecting children

2023 Annual Report



Government
of South Australia

Acknowledgement of Country

Aboriginal people have made and continue to make a unique and irreplaceable contribution to the state of South Australia. The South Australian Government acknowledges and respects Aboriginal people as the state's First People and Nations, and recognises Aboriginal people as Traditional Owners and occupants of South Australian Land and Waters.

The South Australian Government acknowledges that the spiritual, social, cultural and economic practices of Aboriginal people come from their Traditional Lands and Waters, and that Aboriginal people maintain cultural and heritage beliefs, languages and laws which are of ongoing importance today.

We acknowledge that Aboriginal peoples have endured past injustice and dispossession of their traditional lands and waters.

Note regarding language: This report uses the term 'Aboriginal' to refer to people who identify as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Note regarding images: Images used throughout this document include the DCP Aboriginal Child Placement Principle elements and precursor.

Readers are asked to note that references in this report to Aboriginal children, families and communities refer to people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Support services

The work of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and the South Australian Government's reporting may be distressing to some people.

If at any time you feel that you would like to speak with someone, there are many services and support groups that can help. Some options for advice and support include:

- **Lifeline** on 13 11 14
- **13YARN** on 13 92 76
- **1800 Respect** on 1800 737 732
- **National Redress Information Line** on 1800 737 377

Department for Child Protection
31 Flinders Street
Adelaide, SA 5000

For enquiries, please email CPReform@sa.gov.au

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Foreword

Children and young people must be at the centre of our whole of government, whole of community and whole of sector efforts.

Improving outcomes with and for them is at the heart of our child protection and family support system reform.

We are determined to help progress lasting reform that makes a positive difference in children and young people's lives. To help progress reform, we have established groups to inform our focus and help advance better outcomes.

The activities described in this 2023 Safe and well Annual Report show the considerable work that has occurred to progress and consolidate change that supports families, children and young people.

Underpinning these efforts is a \$372 million investment in the child protection and family support system since March 2022.

Safe and well provides detail about a unified child protection and family support approach across government, community and our partner agencies and about the over 500 recommendations from two Royal Commissions which have been advanced.

It is time for a new approach that sets an even more ambitious agenda – one that addresses the deeply complex and inter-connected issues children and their families face and the disproportionate number of Aboriginal children and young people in contact with the child protection and family support system.

The successor plan to Safe and well will provide a child protection and family support strategy and effort for the future that is inclusive, transparent, connected and accountable, that has children at its centre with a relentless focus on improving outcomes for them and that brings the whole community, government and sector to that effort.

As we go about progressing change, it is vital that we hear the views of those involved firsthand to inform our understanding of what works. Acting on the advice provided by Dr Fiona Arney in her inquiry, I am establishing the Carer Council to hear directly from carers. This will provide valuable insights,

along with the Direct Experience Group made up of families directly involved in the child protection and family support system, No Capes for Change, comprising young people with a care experience, the Peak Body for Aboriginal children and young people and our Heads of Industry group.

We need our child protection and family support system to be based on evidence and to draw on the advice of other experts. In response to the reviews conducted by Malcom Hyde AO and Kate Alexander, the government has established a Child Protection Expert Group headed by Professor Leah Bromfield which has begun its work to help us shape the future direction of child protection and family support in South Australia. We have also established a Chief Executive Governance Group to strengthen and align the focus on child protection and family support and drive collective effort across government agencies to improve children's lives.

Consistent with taking a deliberate and considered approach to prioritising child protection and family support, the two most recent State Budgets have invested an additional \$372 million.

Our comprehensive review of the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017* will also fundamentally shape child protection and family support in South Australia. Amongst many other important reforms, this includes considering approaches to enable greater self-determination by Aboriginal people – a significant milestone in recognising that Aboriginal people are best placed to make decisions about the safety and wellbeing of their children, and a vital step forward in maintaining our enduring focus on Closing the Gap.

The Hon Katrine Hildyard MP
Minister for Child Protection



Introduction

This report is the fourth combined annual report on the actions being taken by the State Government in response to two significant Royal Commissions: the Child Protection Systems Royal Commission (CPSRC) and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (RCIRCSA).

It outlines progress in implementing the combined total of 516 recommendations across these Royal Commissions as well as progress on the across government child protection and family support reform agenda, as set out in *Safe and well: Supporting families, protecting children*, released in December 2019. Since that time there have been further reviews, most notably those completed in 2022 by Kate Alexander, Malcolm Hyde AO APM and Dr Fiona Arney, along with the review of the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017* and the ongoing Inquiry by the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People. We remain committed to continuing to reform child protection and family support to improve children's lives.

This Safe and well 2023 Annual Report provides an account of the key accomplishments in child protection and family support reform under Safe and well, and what has been achieved in the 2022-23 financial year. It reflects the work that has been done to strengthen families, protect children and young people, enable them to be loved and nurtured and to support them in care and on leaving care to thrive and reach their full potential. This work has occurred across the state government, led by the Department for Child Protection together with:

- Department of Human Services
- Department for Health and Wellbeing
- Department for Education
- South Australian Housing Authority
- South Australia Police
- Attorney-General's Department
- Department of the Premier and Cabinet
- Department of Treasury and Finance
- Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing.

Summary of progress on recommendations

In 2022-23, an additional 8 recommendations have been completed from the CPSRC, and an additional 24 have been completed from the RCIRCSA.

56 recommendations are currently being progressed by the state government[^]. For a full account of the status and progress of each recommendation, see Appendix 1.

Status	CPSRC	RCIRCSA	Total
Complete	246	203	449
Implementing	10	20	30
Planning	0	14	14
For further consideration	0	10	10
Split*	0	6	6
Not accepted	4	3	7
Total	260	256	516

[^] Comprises all recommendations with a reported status of 'Planning, Implementing and For further consideration' and one recommendation with a status of 'Split'

* Split responses include those where parts of the recommendation have been progressed separately and the reported status includes parts that are either completed, being implemented, planned, further considered or not accepted



Strengthening families

Children and young people thrive when they grow up loved, supported and connected to families and communities. By listening to the voices of children and young people and drawing on the expertise of diverse groups we improve children's lives and better respond to the complexity of issues that vulnerable families face.

The South Australian Government has continued to expand the network of services and supports available to strengthen families. Services and supports are being implemented that include intensive and therapeutic approaches to help families address the difficult, complex and deeply interconnected issues they may face in their everyday life - intergenerational trauma, poverty, domestic and family violence, racism, mental illness and substance misuse.

Our approach aims to have children at the centre, is based on research, expert advice and listening to the voices of those with direct experience. We are building our understanding of families' needs and the therapeutic supports they require. We are ensuring services are trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive to the complexities and disadvantage that vulnerable families may experience.

For Aboriginal families, family-led decision making and effective intervention that is co-designed by Aboriginal people and delivered by Aboriginal service providers are core to our efforts to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children engaged with the child protection and family support system.

National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children

Safe and Supported is Australia's national framework to help children in Australia to grow up safe and supported in their families, communities and culture. It aims to make significant and sustained progress in reducing the rate of child abuse and neglect and its intergenerational impacts across Australia.

Together with the Commonwealth Department of Social Services, South Australia, through the Department for Child Protection (DCP), co-led the development of the Framework and its two 5 year Actions Plans, in collaboration with state and territory governments, SNAICC – National Voice for our Children, the Aboriginal Leadership Group and the National Coalition. The Action Plans were launched on 31 January 2023 and set out the key activities to be achieved at a national level over the next four years to deliver the Safe and Supported strategy.

The Safe and Supported: First Action Plan 2023–2026 focuses on all children and families who are vulnerable, with an emphasis on actions and strategies to support the four Safe and Supported priority groups.

The Safe and Supported: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023–2026 details dedicated strategies and actions to achieve the Closing the Gap Target 12, to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care. Both Actions Plans are co-led by governments with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders.

Expansion of family group conferencing

Family group conferences are a critical strategy in working with families to help them identify how they can keep their children safe. The government introduced family group conferences into its child protection and family support service response through a trial program which commenced in 2020. In March 2023, the State Government committed an additional \$13.4m over 4 years to expand the Family Group Conferencing program, with a focus on Aboriginal families.

As at 30 June 2023 more than 750 referrals had been made for family group conferences, with 386 conferences held to proactively manage child safety concerns. Of the 386 conferences, 55.7% were held with Aboriginal families.

Safely reunifying children

Reunification services play an integral role in the child protection and family support system and in our work to keep families safely together. We are committed to a safe and planned approach to family reunification, undertaking thorough assessments to determine whether the needs of each child and young person in care will be best met by reunification with their family or via a long-term care placement.

Through the delivery of family reunification services across the state, each year, over 200 children and young people are safely reunited with their families. In the 2023–2024 State Budget, the State Government announced an additional \$2.1m over the next 4 years to increase reunification services to reunite families with children and young people in care.

Intensive support for family reunification

The New Parent and Infant Network (Newpin) program, delivered by Uniting Communities, is helping to bring children in care and their parents safely back together. The program supports families with young children who are on a temporary care and protection order where reunification has been deemed appropriate, through an intensive therapeutic centre-based program. The third planned Newpin Centre in Morphett Vale opened in January 2023, alongside centres in Smithfield and Port Adelaide.

Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care

Recognising the important role that early childhood education and care plays in child development, the State Government established a Royal Commission led by former Prime Minister the Hon Julia Gillard AC in October 2022. The Royal Commission considered how early childhood education and care can improve outcomes for all South Australian children, including through universal quality preschool for children aged three and four years and universal out of school hours care for preschool and primary school aged children.

In April 2023, the interim report of the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care was released, and the final report has now also been released.

First 1000 days of life

The first 1000 days are a critical period of development that shapes long-term outcomes. In February and March 2023, stakeholders from across South Australia representing early childhood services, unions, researchers, public health, sector peak bodies, government agencies, statutory functions and non-government support services came together on two occasions to inform the Royal Commission's considerations on how early childhood education and care could better support families and children in the first 1000 days. There was broad consensus supporting coordinated and improved data sharing systems and mechanisms to support families and children attending and not attending early childhood education and care services.

Early Learning Strategy

The first 5 years of a child's life are crucial in developing the foundational skills and abilities they need to be successful at school and in life. To better support families and their children in these early years, the government has committed an initial \$50.1m toward the Early Learning Strategy 2021 to 2031: All young children thriving and learning.

Developmental checks in preschool

In July 2022, two co-designed 18-month pilot programs were launched to expand the reach of free child development checks for children aged 0 to 5 years. The development checks are designed to assist in the identification of developmental concerns and support referral pathways for additional support. The developmental checks are being delivered at more than 40 playgroups across metropolitan and regional areas and are expected to reach more than 400 children.

Navigating the early years system

To better understand how parents and caregivers are navigating the early years system in South Australia, the government partnered with Caring Futures Institute at Flinders University to undertake a research project to gain insight into the barriers and enablers to accessing services and supports within the early years system.

The project examined the early years system from the perspectives of a range of key stakeholders, including a diverse range of caregivers of children up to 6 years of age, service providers including allied health professionals, child and youth health nurses and representatives from organisations across the early years system. Key findings and recommendations were published in the Navigating the Early Years Report, which was released in July 2022. We are continuing to engage across key departments and organisations to communicate the findings and identify system improvements.

Supporting the emotional regulation and social skills of preschool aged children

In May 2023, the State Government and the Kalaya Children's Centre launched the Ngaityu Muiyu Tantu – My Feelings Bag initiative. The initiative aims to support Aboriginal pre-school aged children and their families to develop social skills and emotional regulation strategies, in language. The bag contains supports for parents to read, yarn and sing with their children. The Kalaya Children's Centre, through its

established partnerships, has distributed the Ngaityu Muiyu Tantu – My Feelings Bag to over 600 families across the state.

Additional funding for intensive family support services

The State Government has committed an additional \$35.7m to increase intensive family support services to strengthen families, prioritising families living in the northern metropolitan Adelaide region. This funding aims to have more families receive services to stay safely together through targeted, specialised interventions. The additional funding boosts existing family support services and will allow for an additional 250 vulnerable families to receive assistance.

Targeted support for families

To ensure that every South Australian child grows up safe and healthy a number of targeted initiatives have been implemented across the state to empower families with the knowledge and skills they need for their parenting role.

In May 2023, the State Government partnered with local services to deliver the Good, Better, Best Men's Expo in the Adelaide's northern suburbs. The expo was aimed at supporting men to be the best versions of themselves to contribute to sustainable families, relationships, workplaces and communities. The expo promoted a range of parenting workshops, webinars and supports available including the Good, Better, Best Men program. The 9-week program provides a safe and respectful space for men to connect and explore issues and experiences as well as build on existing communication skills.

A range of parenting workshops, webinars and supports have been made available to parents and caregivers across the state through Families Growing Together workshops. The workshops are based on the Parenting Easy Guides and include topics such as brain and child development, understanding behaviours, handling conflict and cyber safety, with specific workshops developed for priority populations including multicultural families, male care givers and young parents.

New Domestic Violence Prevention and Recovery Hubs

Domestic and family violence (DFV) is one of the leading causes for families to come to the attention of the child protection and family support system. To facilitate the important work to support, connect and empower women experiencing DFV, new DFV Prevention and Recovery Hubs are being established in Adelaide's south and north. The two new hubs will build on the 10 women's safety hubs operating across regional South Australia.

Additional domestic and family violence legal services in regional areas

Rates of domestic and family violence are higher in regional, rural and remote areas. Women in these areas also face unique challenges related to their location and the cultural and social characteristics that come with living in a small community.

In November 2022, the State Government announced that women in regional areas who experience domestic and family violence will have increased access to face-to-face legal services following an additional \$1.6m investment in legal services in the Upper Spencer Gulf and Limestone Coast.

Coercive control awareness raising

Coercive control is a form of domestic violence. In 15 March 2023, a public forum on coercive control was held. Approximately 350 attendees heard from domestic and family violence advocates Sue and Lloyd Clarke, Minister for Women and the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence the Hon Katrina Hildyard MP, and panellists from domestic and family violence support organisations. The forum marked a concerted effort to raise community awareness about coercive control and to strengthen the capacity of community members to see the signs and speak up.

A South Australian media campaign, 'See the Signs', was created to strengthen community awareness of coercive control, reinforce the services available to people experiencing domestic and family violence, and to change attitudes and behaviour around men's violence against women, focusing on education and awareness of non-physical forms of violence.

The campaign targeted young people aged 15-24 in recognition of the importance of early intervention and changing attitudes before problematic behaviours become entrenched. Running on social media and with outdoor advertising, the campaign ran from 26 March – 6 May 2023, and made over 1,836,879 impressions online.

Mental health support in government high schools

In February 2023, the State Government committed over \$50m to provide a mental health service to support young people in government high schools. The service, available at 65 high schools, area schools and R-12 schools, will see 100 mental health practitioners provide support to young people with mild to moderate and emerging mental health concerns.

The mental health service complements the range of existing mental health and wellbeing services already available in schools, including Student Wellbeing Leaders, Student Support Services and the Social Work Incident Support Service (SWISS). Mental health practitioners will provide a brief intervention service and will work with other health providers to refer students who require treatment and support for complex and significant mental health issues.

Other Child Protection and Family Support System Services

The Child and Family Support System (CFSS) provides a continuum of services delivered by government and non-government organisations, designed to respond to differing degrees of complexity and safety concerns for children and families, ranging from community capacity building to intensive family support services.

Building on from the services that have been implemented, a number of pilots have been independently evaluated and subsequently extended and funded. These include:

● Taikurtirna Tirra Apinthe – Making Families Safer

Taikurtirna Tirra Apinthe program provides culturally responsive, trauma-informed, family focused Intensive Family Services for Aboriginal families at imminent risk of having their children placed in care.

● Stronger Together

Stronger Together is an in-home Intensive Family Service, which supports families in the northern suburbs at imminent risk. It is designed to strengthen families and help children remain safely in their homes.

● Breathing Space

The Breathing Space program supports young women, aged 25 and under, who have had one or more children removed from their care. The program supports young mothers to break the cycle.

Strong Families Strong Communities

This program continues to assist families with medium to low level risk concerns. There are now 16 programs delivered by non-government organisations that will service metropolitan Adelaide, rural and regional South Australia including the Far North, Eyre and Western regions. Families and communities are now able to self-refer into the program to access earlier help and support when experiencing vulnerability. Services include tailored therapeutic supports, strengths-based case management, group programs, service navigation assistance and advocacy, as well as community capacity building and peer support initiatives. It is expected the program will support around 550 families each year.

More efficient multi-agency safety responses

Under South Australia's Family Safety Framework, organisations responding to victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence collaborate closely to provide a coordinated safety response to those at high risk of serious harm or death.

A new digital online platform was developed and launched in July 2022 to enable organisations and government and non-government agencies to more easily hold online meetings and share information. The Family Safety Portal allows agencies to assess risk and make referrals to a Family Safety Meeting in a highly secure digital environment. Since its launch in July 2022, 857 referrals have been made through the Family Safety Portal representing a significant step forward for the safety and wellbeing of victim-survivors, especially those living in regional and rural areas.

Additional funding for Grandcarers SA

Grandparents who care for their grandchildren receive different levels of support. In June 2022, the State Government committed \$200,000 per annum to Grandcarers SA, to deliver comprehensive support through financial assistance, personal support, information provision, and advocacy.

Keeping children and young people with complex disability needs with their birth family

Children and young people with disability or developmental delay are overrepresented in the child protection and family support system. Many have complex needs due to a combination of their disability or developmental delay and experiences of trauma.

To support children and young people with complex disability needs to remain in their care of their birth family specialist disability consultants provide support for families to help them navigate the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). This includes supporting access to the NDIS, ensuring that the child or young person's NDIS plan is appropriate to their specific needs, as well as providing support to find and engage with registered NDIS service providers.

From 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023, over 100 children and young people with complex disability needs have been supported to remain with their families through the facilitation of access to NDIS-funded services for the families.

High risk chronic non-attenders in South Australia

In March 2023, DCP and the Department for Education refreshed their commitment to work in partnership to support children and young people who are high-risk chronic non-attenders in South Australia. The jointly developed Memorandum of Administrative Arrangement includes a documented governance structure, formalised escalation pathway, and a planned approach to data and reporting.

Alcohol and other drugs in child protection and family support practice training

To better equip government staff to understand the impact of alcohol and other drug use on families, children and young people, a new foundational training package, Alcohol and other drugs in child protection and family support practice, was made available.

The 90-minute online training has been developed for DCP staff who work directly with children and young people or caregivers who use alcohol and other drugs and aims to provide an understanding of substance misuse within the child protection and family support context. The training includes things that need to be considered by staff when assessing, engaging with and providing interventions to young people or adults who use alcohol and other drugs.

The background of the top half of the page is a solid blue color. Overlaid on this are several white lines that create a series of overlapping triangles and a large, sweeping curve. One line starts from the top left and goes diagonally down to the right. Another line starts from the top center and goes diagonally down to the right, intersecting the first line. A third line starts from the top right and goes diagonally down to the left, intersecting the second line. These lines form a series of triangles. A fourth line starts from the top right and goes diagonally down to the left, intersecting the third line. This line then curves downwards and to the left, forming a large, sweeping arc that spans across the middle of the page.

Thriving in care

All children have the right to live free from abuse and neglect and we all have a role to play in ensuring they can. For children and young people in care, it is critical that we provide therapeutic support to help them heal from trauma. Our care environments and services need to respond to their voices and be designed to strengthen their sense of self, belonging and connection.

We want children and young people to be loved, safe from abuse and neglect and to thrive. Central to this is listening to children and young people. Through all parts of the child protection and family support system we are amplifying the voices of children and young people.

For children and young people who are unable to safely live with their parents, we want them to feel loved, connected and to thrive. Family-based care provides a safe, nurturing and stable care environment for the majority of children and young people. Foster and kinship carers are crucial to the child protection and family support system, and we are committed to listening to them through the establishment of a Carer Council.

We are working to keep children and young people connected to their communities. For Aboriginal children and young people, we are focused on helping ensure they have a strong sense of identity and are connected to Country and culture. We are investing in improving our cultural awareness and understanding and growing the footprint of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

Building a focus on child safety

Increasing payments for carers

In June 2023, the State Government announced an increase in carer payments. From 1 July 2023, all carer payments increased by 4.8%. In addition, general foster and kinship carers receive an extra \$50 per fortnight for each child under the age of 16.

Flexible Respite Support pilot program

The State Government has been working to provide more flexibility in the respite support options for carers. The Flexible Respite Support Pilot program will work with family-based carers, kinship and foster care agencies, and Connecting Foster and Kinship Carers SA to explore other options that provide a respite-like effect to help improve the wellbeing of carers and strengthen placements for children and young people in family-based care.

New models of family-based care

In partnership with Life Without Barriers, 6 MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ constellations have been launched to connect carers living in similar areas. These constellations are an innovative model of carer support that act as an extended family, with a hub home at the centre of the constellation to support families through planned and emergency sleepovers as well as the provision of advice, training and peer support. Constellations are operating in Marino, Fairview Park, Strathalbyn, Lobethal, Seaton and Hope Valley and continue to be effective in providing carer support and respite, preventing placement breakdowns and engaging families in activities and the sharing of their care journey.

Support for kinship carers

Kinship care is the largest form of family-based care in South Australia and is continuing to grow, providing stable homes for children and young people in care and supporting them to stay connected to family and culture. In recognition of the importance of kinship care, a new approach has been developed to support kinship carers through the Kinship Care program in consultation with kinship carers, staff, the Guardian for Children and Young People and the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People. The Targeted Support Approach has been developed to provide more flexible and tailored support for kinship carers, with carers, based on their individual need.

To better support kinship carers, the kinship support workforce has been expanded by a further 16 FTEs. In addition, the 2023-24 budget provides \$4 million for an additional seven full-time equivalent staff to undertake additional kinship care assessments. This will help to ensure kinship placements are rigorously explored for children and young people to support them in keeping strong connections with family, community and culture.

Enhancing the focus on child safety

Child and Young Person Visitor

To promote the best interests of children and young people living in non-family based care in 2022, the State Government provided funding of \$1.87 million over four years for the Child and Young Person Visitor (the Visitor), appointing the Guardian for Children and Young People, Shona Reid, to the role. Amongst other things the Visitor is responsible for conducting visits to residential care facilities across

the state and providing advice to the Minister for Child Protection on systemic reform needed to improve the care, treatment and support for young people living in residential care.

Children and young people who are missing or absent

In May 2023, the State Government introduced new guidance to respond to children and young people that are missing or absent from placement. This new guidance is based on a process developed in partnership with South Australia Police (SAPOL). The new guidance embeds an interagency approach to keeping children and young people safe, and includes consultation with practitioners, interagency partners and service providers. Training has been delivered to staff to ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities when children and young people are missing or absent, complemented by resources and tailored guidance for non-government partner organisations and carers.

Needs based care and protection

Ensuring service delivery meets demand

In early 2023 DCP completed a boundary realignment for its offices to support a more consistent service delivery approach across the state. This realignment has also directed more resources towards the northern metropolitan region in line with current demand. In the 2023-24 Budget, DCP received total additional office accommodation funding of \$5.2m to source and fit-out accommodation in targeted areas to better meet the needs of children and young people in care across the state.

Supporting children to heal from trauma

Carers are now able to access trauma-informed care training through the Caring for Children and Young People with Trauma program which is delivered by the Australian Childhood Foundation (ACF) Centre for Excellence in Therapeutic Care. The Program is delivered online and supports family-based carers to deepen their knowledge of trauma and develop skills to provide trauma-informed responsive care to children and young people.

ACF has also been commissioned to develop another training package which responds to the needs of Aboriginal carers and carers of Aboriginal children and young people. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations KWY, AFSS and Incompro are key partners in this work.

Practice approach training for the sector

The State Government and Child and Family Focus SA (CAFFSA) have been running three Practice Approach workplace learning sessions each month for DCP, non-government organisations (NGO) other staff who support children and young people in care and carers. In 2022-2023, around 400 participants attended each month receiving training on various topics including the Assessment Framework, practice learnings, transition planning for children and young people, and working with infants.

Responding to domestic and family violence

In 2022, the State Government partnered with the Social Work Innovation Research Living Space (SWIRLS) at Flinders University to co-design the Responding to Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) in the Context of Child Protection: Advanced Understanding and Leadership course. More than 100 staff, including practice leaders, Aboriginal practice leaders, supervisors and senior practitioners, participated in the first intake of the course, which includes a combination of six online modules and three face-to-face master classes.

Cultural connection and identity

In November 2022, the State Government announced the immediate recruitment of an additional 10 Aboriginal practice leaders and 42 social workers in response to reports into the child protection and family support system by former Police Commissioner Malcolm Hyde AO APM and child protection and family support expert Kate Alexander. These additional Principal Aboriginal Consultants will work with social workers to provide cultural advice and expertise when working with Aboriginal families involved in the child protection and family support system.

Family led decision-making for Aboriginal families

The State Government has continued to embed the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle (ACPP) into front-end practice by increasing family group conferencing services to further promote family led decision making. The scope of the Taikurtirna Warri-apinthe Program is expanding to provide agile and culturally safe responses to assist with identifying placement options for Aboriginal children and young people in accordance with the ACPP. The program has been implemented in 6 DCP offices, and is expected to be rolled out to all DCP metropolitan Adelaide offices by late 2023.

Further consideration will be given to embedding the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle to the standards of active efforts through the review of the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*.

Connecting to culture, community and Country

DCP staff on the Eyre Peninsula have developed a new initiative titled *This is Who You Are*, which aims to support Aboriginal children and young people in care to remain connected to their culture, community and Country. Cultural toolkits which include soil from their Country, a figurine of their totem and information about their clan group and stories provided by local Elders will be distributed to 60 children and young people from the peninsula's five nations. It is hoped that over time, children and young people from the Kokatha, Nauo, Wirangu, Barngarla and Mirning Nations will add to these toolkits as they grow.

Young person focused non-family based care

Providing therapeutic residential care

The State Government has continued to embed the Sanctuary Model of therapeutic care across its residential care homes. The evidence-based Sanctuary Model is founded on the same trauma-informed care principles that are central to work with children and young people in care.

The State Government has collaborated with Monash University to ensure implementation of the Sanctuary Model is practice-based, outcomes focused and accountable to formal external evaluation standards.

Refreshing and personalising care environments

The MyPlace program is a therapeutically-driven initiative aimed at enhancing and personalising home environments for children and young people in residential care. The program works with young people to better understand their unique needs and create a warm culturally safe, inclusive and enriching home environment.

Keeping children in their communities

The State Government has partnered with ac.care to establish additional residential care homes for young people living in the Riverland and Limestone Coast. This initiative includes the first 24/7 residential care home in Berri, meaning that more children from the region can stay close to their communities.

Environments that keep children safe

Supporting safe sexual behaviour

The Mackillop Institute's Power to Kids: Respecting Sexual Safety program is training staff in prevention and intervention strategies to help children and young people at risk of experiencing harmful sexual behaviours, child exploitation and abuse, and domestic and family violence. The program aims to improve children and young people's awareness of respectful relationships, grooming, sexual development and sexual health, recognising that these are critical to building protective factors against sexual exploitation. Over 90 staff from 14 residential care homes have now completed the Power to Kids program training.

Harmful sexual behaviours

The State Government is also supporting research to better understand the causes, effects, prevention and treatment of harmful sexual behaviour displayed by children. This initiative is co-funded by the South Australian and Western Australian Governments and will be led by the Australian Centre for Child Protection to identify and develop strategies to work with children displaying inappropriate sexual behaviour.

In September 2022, the State Government, in collaboration with the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia and Catholic Education South Australia released a new sexual behaviour in children and young people procedure and guideline. The procedure and guideline support educators and leaders in all South Australian public, Catholic and independent education and care settings to prevent and respond to children and young people's concerning and harmful sexual behaviour. The State Government has developed resources to support the implementation of the procedure and guideline, including templates, factsheets and webpages, in addition to face-to-face and online training for leaders, educators and volunteers.

Keeping children safe at school

The State Government has updated the Responding to Risks of Harm, Abuse and Neglect in Education in Care (RRHAN-EC) training. The training is mandatory for all staff, volunteers and third-party providers working in education and care setting across government and non-government schools. Since July 2021, approximately 118,361 people have completed the RRHAN-EC fundamentals training and 18,849 have completed the masterclass.

In 2023, the State Government received Child Safe Environments (CSE) compliance for all schools and early years services under legislative requirements. The State Government has also reviewed relevant policies, procedures and other resources to assist schools to implement the National Statement of Principles for Child Safe Organisations.

The South Australian Government is also working with non-government schools to ensure that record management standards are consistent with those in government schools by providing information and record management policies, procedures, templates, training material, disposal schedules and other resources to the Independent and Catholic school sectors. State Records of South Australia recently released a record keeping guideline suitable for non-government institutions and will recommend that non-government schools follow this guideline and use the same record retention period as government schools.

Improved information sharing between Australian teacher regulatory authorities

In December 2022, Australian teacher regulatory authorities in each state and territory executed a detailed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which promotes and sets out the powers to share information with each other about individual teachers in various circumstances to promote the safety and wellbeing of children. This initiative anticipates future safeguarding steps in preparation of the automatic mutual recognition of teacher registration commencing in South Australia in 2027. The MoU has had its first review of operation which concluded in July 2023.

In addition to the MoU, ongoing work is being progressed via the Australasian Teacher Regulatory Authorities to improve consistency through information shared in teacher registration, while protecting teacher data privacy.

National Information Sharing Working Group

The SA Health Chief Child Protection Officer (CCPO) represents South Australia as a member of the National Information Sharing Working Group established by the National Office for Child Safety (NOCS) and the Victorian Department of Education and Training. This group is exploring opportunities to improve sharing of child safety and wellbeing information between government agencies and institutions within and across sectors and jurisdictions. States and territories are also using the group to improve national consistency of Working With Children Checks to keep children and young people safe.

Responding to perpetrators of child sexual abuse

Law reform to improve child safety

The *Statutes Amendment (Child Sex Offences) Act 2022* commenced on 1 October 2022, amending a number of existing pieces of legislation in South Australia to enact harsher penalties for perpetrators of child sexual abuse. The Act increases the maximum penalties on a range of child sex offences in the *Criminal Law Consolidation Act 1935* to ensure that they are consistent with the severity of the conduct and consistent with penalties applied for equivalent offences interstate. The amendment also updates the list of registrable offences in the *Child Sex Offenders Registration Act 2006*, including the addition of a range of newer Commonwealth offences.

Following the commencement of the *Statutes Amendment (Child Sexual Abuse) Act 2021* on 1 June 2022, the South Australian Court of Appeal is due to hear the first interlocutory appeal under the new provision in the latter half of 2023.

Avoiding delays to court proceedings

In addition to prioritising child sexual abuse prosecutions in the District Court, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) has implemented a range of measures to avoid delays in proceedings. Measures include a specialised team to focus on these matters in the pre-trial stages and applications for pre-trial special hearings to allow eligible witnesses to give evidence in advance of the trial.

The ODPP has also recently incorporated proposed edits to vulnerable witness interviews within the prosecution case statement filed at arraignment, with the aim of identifying and potentially resolving pre-trial argument at an earlier stage.

The ODPP policy 'Victims' right to review of discretionary prosecutorial decisions' is currently under review. Following this process, the updated policy will be published.

Child sex offenders register

As part of the 'justice for victims policy', the South Australian Government has committed to creating a three-tiered scheme for access to information on the child sex offenders register, based on the Western Australia disclosure model.

The State Government has also committed to passing new laws for indefinite detention so that serious sex offenders will stay in prison until they can control their sexual instincts. These new laws also mean that offenders will face lifetime electronic monitoring when they re-enter the community.

The background is a solid orange color. Overlaid on this are several thin white lines that create a geometric pattern. One line runs diagonally from the top left towards the bottom right. Another line runs diagonally from the top right towards the bottom left. These two lines intersect. A third line runs horizontally across the top of the image. A fourth line runs vertically down the right side of the image. These lines form a series of triangles and quadrilaterals. A large, stylized white 'X' is formed by the intersection of the two main diagonal lines.

Breaking the cycle

Children and young people in care and leaving care deserve to feel ready and equipped with the confidence and skills they need to move towards independence and happy and empowered lives beyond care. By investing in children and young people with a care experience, we can help them reach their full potential and break the intergenerational cycle of contact with the child protection and family support system.

We are continuing to invest in children and young people with a care experience to provide them with the foundation and life skills they need to thrive as independent adults with agency over their lives. The State Government has continued to make significant investment in supports for young people as they leave care, including \$9 million in the two most recent State Budgets. The partnerships we enter into through the Investing in their future initiative continue to grow and diversify. This is providing children and young people in care with an ever expanding suite of services and opportunities, which they can continue to access and benefit from while in care and after they have left care.

We are investing additional funding in extending post-care services, and piloting new initiatives to support young people leaving residential care to the age of 21. This builds on our previous commitment to provide family-based carers with extended payments so that young people can continue living with their carers after they turn 18.

Investing in their future

We want young people with an experience of the child protection and family support system to have the opportunity to thrive and achieve their personal best. In 2021 the State Government launched the Investing in their future initiative, embarking on a new approach to partnering with services and organisations to provide children and young people with a care experience with the services and opportunities to meet these aspirations. Importantly, the initiative acknowledges that the actions taken now and the opportunities we actively pursue are critical in setting children and young people up for success and helping to break intergenerational contact with the child protection and family support system.

Under the initiative there has been a deliberate approach to bring discrete project activities into a cohesive program of work. Since the establishment of Investing in their future, the State Government has continued to pursue a broad range of partnerships, services and programs for children and young people in care and post-care to ensure their key life domain needs are met, including education, housing, health, dental and disability.

Strengthening educational outcomes

A partnership approach to improving educational outcomes

Since 2020, DCP and the Department for Education have implemented joint plans of action to build upon their longstanding commitment and efforts to transform the experience and learning outcomes of children and young people in care in South Australian government-run education facilities. Two joint plans of action have been developed to date, with the third joint plan of action planned for release in late 2023.

Since the first joint plan of action in 2020, key achievements include:

- Establishing the state-wide Children in Care Service in the Department for Education in 2020 to work alongside staff within Education and DCP to improve education outcomes for children and young people in care. The service has received more than 1300 service requests, of which 600 have led to active case work to support a child or young person in care.
- Funding being available for children and young people in care to support key transition points in their schooling.
- Executing a DCP and Education data sharing agreement in June 2021 to increase data-led service provision. Data is being used to identify children not enrolled in preschool, to quantify the number and consider a bespoke approach to actively support individual children and case workers with enrolment.
- Commencing work on developing an education dashboard. Testing of the dashboard prototype will take place in the second half of 2023, with initial focus on enrolment, attendance and behaviour data items.
- Launching the Education Champions initiative in 2020. Education Champions help to navigate the interface between the education and child protection and family support systems. In 2023 the Education Champions were expanded to include representatives from funded family based care providers and residential care providers. There are now over 70 champions across DCP and non-government partner organisations who attend quarterly link ups. The link ups support DCP and NGO staff to better understand and navigate the education system. The link ups also provide an opportunity to 'deep dive' into topics

that are relevant for children and young people in care such as the Flexible Learning Options (FLO) redesign and how a proposed new FLO model can better support young people in care, particularly those in residential care.

- DCP and Education have collaborated to develop complementary resources on the best ways to support children and young people in residential care in their education.

Non-government schools scholarships for children in care

The State Government has continued to partner with Catholic Education South Australia (CESA) to provide scholarships for children and young people in care in Catholic schools across metropolitan and regional locations, an arrangement first established in 2020.

The State Government has also entered into partnerships with 6 independent schools to offer scholarships for children and young people in care to attend their educational institution fee-free with a package of educational supports.

Over 400 students have been awarded a scholarship under the scholarship program.

Improving health outcomes through partnership

Child and Family Health Services (CaFHS) 'Blue Book'

DCP has partnered with SA Health to include an addition, specific to children in care, in the CaFHS 'Blue Book'. This will allow additional information such as health checks for children in care to be recorded whilst also providing further information to carers about different services and resources available for children in care.

Improving oral health

Good oral health is a key indicator of overall health and is important for general wellbeing and quality of life.

In 2021, The State Government and SA Dental established a Memorandum of Administrative Agreement (MoAA) that recognises their shared responsibility for ensuring access to and provision of dental services for children and young people in care. Under the MoAA, in 2022-23, 2505 children and young people in care received examinations and treatments through SA Dental.

The State Government also has a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Australian Dental Foundation, a philanthropic organisation providing dental and orthodontic services in addition to those provided through SA Dental. In 2023 this included provision of fee-capped orthodontic care to children and young people who would otherwise not have been able to receive dental care.

Streamlining information sharing between DCP and SA Health

DCP and SA Health have developed a streamlined approach to information sharing under Section 152 of the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*. DCP Offices in the Far North Far West region and the Flinders and Upper North Local Health Network (FUNLHN) commenced a pilot of the new streamlined approach in April 2023. This will be assessed in late 2023 to inform further implementation across the sector.

Responding to the disability and developmental needs of children and young people

DCP Disability and Development Program

In 2018, the State Government established the Disability and Development Program (DDP) to provide specialist support to assist staff and carers to respond to the disability and developmental needs of children and young people in care. This includes providing case workers and carers with vital support, guidance and assistance to navigate the NDIS for the over 1437 children in care under 18 years with a NDIS Plan, as at 30 June 2023.

The DDP has continued to expand over time to meet demand. The program operates statewide and comprises three teams staffed with multidisciplinary, allied health professionals with extensive paediatric experience.

The Disability Consultancy Team supports DCP case workers with:

- > consultation about parents with a disability whose children come into contact with the child protection and family support system, including advice on engaging parents and referrals to support services.
- > identifying children and young people with developmental delay or disability presenting to the child protection and family support system or in care.

- > accessing NDIS services for eligible children and young people
- > young people's transition from care by gaining adequate funding for post-care support after their Guardianship order ends.

The Specialist Services Team and Therapeutic Carer Support Team support residential care staff teams and family-based carers to understand and respond to the needs of children and young people in their care.

The DDP also works to raise awareness of the impacts of and developmental delay for children and young people in care, including developing resources and providing training for case workers, residential care staff, kinship support staff and family-based carers.

Building capacity of residential staff to respond to disability and developmental needs

The Disability and Development Program has played a critical role in supporting the disability and developmental needs of children and young people in care through teams of allied health professionals. In June 2023, DCP and Child and Family Focus SA (CAFFSA) co-convened a Disability and Development Forum for non-government residential care service providers to support capacity building of residential care teams who work with children and young people with disability, developmental delay and trauma. The Disability and Development Program is committed to providing learning opportunities for the sector to better support children and young people with complex needs in residential care.

Collaborating to prepare young people for independence

Preparing young people to transition from living in care into adulthood and independence is vitally important. Providing young people leaving care with stable housing and accommodation remains challenging in the current environment, but is critical to their engagement in employment, education and training and supports positive life outcomes.

Supporting care leavers to access housing and accommodation

DCP and the SA Housing Authority (SAHA) have established a Memorandum of Administrative Arrangement (MoAA) and are collaborating through a joint plan of action to improve access to housing outcomes for young people who are transitioning from care.

Under the joint plan of action, DCP and SAHA are working to streamline pathways into housing and achieve better outcomes for young people transitioning from care. To support young people to access housing, DCP has established a Specialist Transition Lead. Since the start of 2022 approximately 80 public housing allocations have been made to young people leaving care.

DCP and SAHA continue to collaborate under the joint plan of action to improve access to safe, affordable and appropriate housing options for young people, including building pathway into community housing and private rentals.

Public Trustee

In January 2023, DCP and the Public Trustee executed a Memorandum of Administrative Arrangement (MoAA) for the management of money received on behalf of a child or young person in care. This agreement ensures that money belonging to a child or young person in care is appropriately managed through the duration of their guardianship arrangement.

Fines Enforcement and Recovery Unit

In 2022, DCP and the Fines Enforcement and Recovery Unit (FERU) established a MoAA Arrangement to help identify and support children and young people in care resolve state government fines and civil debts. Through a data sharing agreement and identification of young people in care with unpaid service invoices, fines and civil debts, both agencies are working towards supporting the resolution of these.

Thrive@Life personal leadership program scholarships

DCP has partnered with Youth Opportunities to provide scholarships for young people in care or with a care experience to complete the Thrive@Life personal leadership program. Since 2022, two groups have undertaken the self-paced online course which is designed to increase wellbeing, resilience, communication and goal-setting skills.

Opportunities to access sport and recreation activities

Innovative sporting partnerships have allowed children and young people in care to attend exciting events and games. Through DCP's partnership with the Adelaide Crows, over 100 children and young people have attended AFL games at Adelaide Oval, including young people in residential care who have been able to attend with their siblings. This initiative has been successful in keeping siblings connected and supporting placements.

Supporting children and young people to be active

In June 2023, DCP in partnership with the Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing (ORSR) held a workshop to explore ways for children and young people in care to lead active lives and be exposed to the positive environments that sport and recreation clubs can provide. A diverse body of stakeholders attended the workshop, including children and young people, family-based carers, sporting organisations, non-government organisations, the Commissioner for Children and Young People, along with DCP and ORSR staff.

DCP and ORSR will continue to collaborate and identify follow-up actions from the workshop to support children and young people in care lead healthy and active lives.

Transition to adulthood and independence

Extended family-based care beyond 18

Supporting young people to continue to live with their family-based carers after they turn 18 provides them with valuable stability and continuity as they adapt to adulthood.

The State Government offers two programs that support young people over 18 to continue residing with their family based carer until the age of 21 or 25 – Stability in Family-Based Care program and the Over 18 Education initiative respectively.

As at 30 June 2023, over 230 young people continued living with their family-based carers under the Stability Post Care program.

Expanding post-care support

In 2022, the State Government allocated additional funding of \$3.2m over 4 years to expand the recommissioning of Post Care Support Services, supporting care leavers to become independent adults and breaking the cycle of child protection contact.

As part of the recommissioning of post care service, DCP has designed a new post-care service model for young people leaving care to align current, established and future transition to adulthood initiatives.

From 1 July 2023, Post Care Support Services are being delivered by Relationships Australia South Australia (RASA) in partnership with Anglicare SA and Kornar Winmil Yunti Aboriginal Corporation (KWY).

Partnership with CREATE Foundation

In 2022, the State Government provided additional funding of \$800,000 over 4 years to the CREATE Foundation, the national body representing the voices of children and young people with a care experience. The additional funding is to assist in developing future housing, work and study pathways through a partnership with young people to participate in this work.

The State Government is also funding the CREATE Foundation to deliver the SORTLI app and the CREATE Your Future program for young people aged 15 to 25 years. These aim to reduce social isolation and empower young people to be informed and independent in decisions about their future. In addition to this, all young people in care aged 16 and 17 are provided with a CREATE Go Your Own Way kit to help in the development of their case plans and to support their transition to independence. In 2022-23, 237 CREATE Go Your Own Way kits were distributed to young people in care.

Supporting young people leaving residential care

Recognising that young people leaving residential care often have complex needs and experience additional challenges, the State Government has invested in two new pilot programs to support young people making the transition from residential care to independent living.

The State Government has invested \$2.6m over 3 and a half years for the Next Steps Pilot Service to support young people with complex needs to age 21 who are transitioning from residential care.

The Next Steps Pilot Service commenced in February 2022 and is supporting 20 young people aged up to 21 years leaving residential care. Centacare Catholic Family Services in partnership with Aboriginal Sobriety Group and Housing Choices SA are delivering the pilot service.

The State Government has also designed the Stability Post Care (SPC) Individual Packages pilot, which commenced 1 July 2023 and will support a further 18 young people up to 21 years leaving DCP funded non-government residential care. \$3.2m over 4 years has been allocated to pilot Stability Post Care Individual Packages for young people to age 21 leaving NGO residential care.

SPC Individual Packages are intended to provide young people with continuity with either their current provider or within their community and will be delivered by non-government providers of residential care and Supported Independent Living Services to June 2027.

The pilot initiatives will be reviewed to assess outcomes for the young participants and to inform future directions for the programs and post-care services more generally.

Dame Roma Mitchell Grants

In 2023, the Dame Roma Mitchell Trust Fund is celebrating 20 years of providing eligible children and young people with grants to achieve personal goals, undertake activities that contribute to their health and wellbeing and engage in personal development opportunities. Each year there are two grant rounds that eligible children and young people who are or have been in care up to the age of 29 years can apply.

In 2022-23, 368 applications were received, with 225 applications approved. Grants enabled young people to purchase laptops for study and professional development, essential furniture and household items, pay for driving lessons and address their health needs.

Supporting survivors of sexual abuse

National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse

The National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse was founded in late 2021 to raise awareness and understanding of child sexual abuse, support help-seeking and guide best practice. It is a partnership between the Australian Childhood Foundation, Blue Knot Foundation and the Healing Foundation.

The SA Health Chief Child Protection Officer (CCPO) is Co-Chair of the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse – National Research, Evaluation and Data Working Group. The Working Group consists of representatives from Australian and state and territory governments. The National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse consults the Working Group as appropriate on implementing research, evaluation and data related measures under the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030.

National Redress Scheme

The State Government joined the National Redress Scheme (NRS) in February 2019. The NRS acknowledges that many children were sexually abused in Australian institutions and holds institutions accountable by assisting individuals to gain access to counselling, a Direct Personal Response (DPR) and a redress payment. Established in response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, it has an operational period of 10 years. Individuals have until 30 June 2027 to make an application to the NRS.

DCP is a South Australian government institution and is the successor for more than 110 institutions that continue to operate or have ceased operation. These include state-run residential care facilities, home-based care placements (foster and kinship care) and up until 2012, juvenile justice settings. A key part of DCP's role is to interrogate records and provide written responses to the NRS in response to requests for information. DCP has the lead role in coordinating DPRs for survivors from all South Australian government institutions.

As at 30 June 2023, DCP has responded to 762 unique applicants for DCP institutions. A total of 30 DPRs have been completed, 27 of those for survivors of abuse in institutions for which DCP is responsible.

An abstract graphic consisting of several white lines of varying lengths and orientations intersecting on a solid green background. The lines create a series of geometric shapes, including triangles and polygons, some of which are partially cut off by the edges of the frame. The overall effect is a modern, minimalist design.

Building a system for the future

We are committed to building a transparent, responsive and accountable child protection and family support system that empowers vulnerable families and has children and their improved outcomes at the centre. This is best achieved by listening to those with experience and expertise, being guided by research and ensuring the system is underpinned by strong governance and accountability mechanisms and collaboration across government, community and the sector.

We continue to take significant steps in driving reform across the South Australian child protection and family support system, spearheaded by a comprehensive review of the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*. The review sets the foundation for an integrated, strategic, and sustainable approach to caring for and protecting children and young people and enabling them to thrive into the future.

We have continued to ensure the voices of children and young people in care are heard through CREATE and the No Capes for Change initiative and are implementing new ways to engage and capture their views about their experiences. Building on this, we are also establishing a Carer Council and, in partnership with Life Without Barriers, a lived experience group to amplify the perspectives of families and individuals.

Over the past year we have enhanced governance arrangements and accountability through the establishment of a new Child Protection expert advisory group. Continued advice from sector experts will help us prioritise immediate reforms and realise our long-term vision.

To improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people, \$3.2m funding has been committed to establish a peak body for Aboriginal children and young people to work together with government as we drive transformative change necessary to close the gap.

Planning for the long term

Review of child protection legislation

We want children and young people to grow up safe, healthy and connected so they reach their full potential.

The foundation for making this happen is set out in the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*, a child-focused legislative framework that emphasises safety and the role of the Minister for Child Protection and cross-government effort in the wellbeing of children and intervention when they may be at risk of harm.

On 5 September 2022, the Minister for Child Protection announced the government was commencing a review of the Act. The review canvassed the views of more than 900 people who provided feedback on a range of opportunities to improve and strengthen the legislation.

Key themes to emerge from the landmark consultation include:

- > deeper embedding of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle elements
- > incorporating a public health approach to child protection and family support
- > providing greater emphasis on the provision of intensive, targeted and therapeutic support to vulnerable families
- > providing more support and earlier planning for young people transitioning from care

- > embedding the Statement of Commitment to foster and kinship carers.

It is anticipated that revised legislation will be introduced into Parliament in late 2023.

Engaging with children and young people

Implementing a child and youth engagement strategy

The State Government continues to expand the way in which it engages and gives voice to children and young people with a care experience, driven by the Child and Youth Engagement Strategy 2021-23.

The No Capes for Change young persons' group has continued to meet throughout the year, providing thoughtful input about critical matters for children and young people in care and leaving care. The impact of the group continues to be recognised, with Ms Felicity Graham, a founding member of the No Capes for Change group, recently recognised as the 7NEWS Young Achiever Awards SA Young Achiever of the Year for her efforts in raising awareness and giving a voice to children in care.

The second year of the Child and Youth Engagement Action Plan has seen processes commence to support establishment of regional Youth Councils across DCP, the streamlining of processes for providing feedback, and development of a child-friendly DCP webpage.

Listening to children and young people

Also under the Child and Youth Engagement Action Plan, the State Government has developed a new survey tool for children and young people. 'My Voice Our Views' (MVOV) is a survey tool that gives children and young people in care an opportunity to share their feelings and opinions. This survey tool is developed for children and young people aged between 5 and 17 years who have been in care for three months or more. It is an additional mechanism for case workers to capture what is important for a child or young person, what is going well, and what may need to improve or change. As of June 2023, the tool was in the process of being finalised and integrated into database systems, with roll-out planned for the year ahead.

Amplifying the voices of carers

Designing a system that meets the needs of children and young people requires us all to listen to the voices of those who care for them.

Carer Council

The State Government has engaged Connecting Foster and Kinship Carers SA – the peak advocacy body for family-based carers in SA – to establish and provide ongoing support to the Carer Council, which will meet at least three times annually to discuss key issues.

The Carer Council will consist of a minimum of 12 current carers appointed by the Minister for Child Protection. Membership will draw on Aboriginal carers and other kinship and foster carers from both metropolitan and regional areas.

Working as part of broader governance and engagement mechanisms, including the recently established Child Protection Expert Group, the Council will contribute to the creation of a long-term vision for a stronger child protection and family support system, ensuring that the voices of carers are central to reform.

Direct (lived) experience group

A new direct experience group is being established to amplify the voices of families.

The State Government has engaged Life Without Barriers to establish and support the direct experience group, with meetings to commence later in 2023.

The group will provide a forum for family members of children in care, those engaged in the child protection and family support system, or individuals who have had a direct experience of the system themselves, to inform system-level changes and contribute to policy and practice development. The group will ensure that reform is informed by the perspectives and experiences of those who have had a lived experience themselves as well as relatives of children placed in care.

Partnering together for better outcomes

Our service partners play a vital role in improving outcomes for children, young people, carers and families. Working collaboratively with service providers helps us to critically understand where quality improvements can be made to support the delivery of better and safer outcomes for children and young people.

Peak body for Aboriginal children and young people

As part of the State Government's commitment to increasing the voice of Aboriginal people and communities, \$3.2m has been invested to establish an independent peak body in South Australia for Aboriginal children and young people. Throughout 2021-2022, SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children – worked with DCP, the South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Network, the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People and other Aboriginal South Australians to identify and develop options for a peak body for Aboriginal children and young people in South Australia.

SNAICC's report was released in August 2022, with work now underway to establish this Aboriginal-led initiative which will ensure that the voices of Aboriginal children and young people are at the centre of all child safety decision making. The peak body is expected to be formed and operational in the second half of 2023.

Active and collaborative partnerships

The State Government continues to actively collaborate with partners across the sector, seeking out innovation and working together to support sector capacity. DCP continued to host Heads of Industry Forums involving 28 key leaders from DCP's contracted Aboriginal Community Controlled

Organisations (ACCOs) and non-government service providers. The focus of these forums continues to be on finding opportunities for closer collaboration, gaining a better understanding of contemporary sector issues and considering enterprising solutions.

A residential care taskforce has been established to address challenges faced by the residential care sector. The taskforce meetings are co-convened by the department and Child and Family Focus SA (CAFFSA) and involve senior staff and service provider partners. Over the past year, taskforce meetings focused on developing a sector-wide approach to building capacity for the delivery of safe, quality residential and supported independent living services to meet demand and the individual needs of young people. Further meetings are scheduled in the year ahead.

Excellence in child protection and family support

The government continued to recognise the outstanding achievements of those in the sector through the SA Child Protection Awards held on 12 September 2022.

Delivered in partnership with the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN), almost 300 nominations were received throughout South Australia across 11 categories – a 60 per cent increase on last year's inaugural awards. An unprecedented number of nominations for carers highlights how much their critical role is valued.

The Strong in Culture Strong in Voice choir took out the Outstanding Achievement award, celebrating the achievement of a child or young person, or group of children/young people, who has had a care experience. The choir includes Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members, and was formed to give young people in residential care a voice whilst also supporting reconciliation efforts.

Growing a skilled and stable workforce

Workforce strategy

As an essential service in our community, child protection work is challenging and complex. Yet every day the child protection workforce shows up to keep children safe and families together.

Building a sustainable workforce is emerging as one of the most critical challenges facing human

service sectors. Maintaining a vibrant workforce into the future requires us to have a clear pipeline that attracts potential workers, one that includes high quality training and supports them to gain employment.

To this end, around 100 leaders from across the child protection and family support sector in South Australia came together in April 2023 for a workforce summit to discuss opportunities to build workforce capacity for the future. Representatives from government and non-government agencies, Aboriginal-led organisations, universities, unions, peak and oversight bodies, as well as carers and young people, explored ideas to elevate child protection and family support as a career of choice and best meet the changing needs of the sector going forward.

The conversations held as part of the summit are informing work underway in the development of a workforce strategy for the broader child protection and family support sector.

A thriving workforce

Development of a national approach to building a skilled and sustainable child and family services workforce was also recently agreed as part of Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031.

A key action in the framework is to build a sustainable workforce to support the transition to Aboriginal-led services for Aboriginal children and families. Consistent with the national framework, this will be a fundamental factor in the planning for the future of the South Australian child protection and family support workforce.

There is continued investment in the workforce, including the allocation of \$4m over 4 years to intensify efforts in assessing and recruiting extended family to care for children and young people. This will assist in continuing to increase the number of carers available to provide care for children and young people in a family-based environment.

To improve DCP recruitment processes, the department has recently implemented a new electronic recruitment system to enhance end-to-end recruitment processes. This work sits alongside other work underway in developing a tailored Aboriginal workforce strategy and a learning and development strategy. Combined, these endeavours will best ensure future efforts focus on building a highly effective, motivated workplace for the betterment of children, young people, families and carers.

Enhancing quality and safeguarding

Quality service delivery

A major project to revitalise the approach of licensing services has recently been completed. A new licensing quality and compliance framework and associated documentation has been approved. This new framework, developed in consultation with the sector, ensures DCP's licensing process meets requirements under the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017* and the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations. Phased implementation of the framework has commenced with the establishment of the Licensing and Compliance Panel in June 2023.

Significant reviews and learnings

The wellbeing and safety of children and young people is important to all of us – outcomes for them must be at the centre of every effort and expectations of the child protection and family support system are high. Over recent years there have been many inquiries and reviews across Australia and South Australia is no exception to this.

In addition to the review of the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017* a number of other inquiries and reviews have been completed over the past year, the most notable of these being:

- > Trust in culture – a review of child protection in South Australia, Kate Alexander (November 2022)
- > Independent Report of the Review of Child Deaths at Munno Para and Craigmare, Malcolm Hyde AO APM (November 2022)
- > Report of the Independent Inquiry into Foster and Kinship Care, Dr Fiona Arney (November 2022).

These reviews and inquiries provide an opportunity to reflect, learn and continue to ensure children are at the centre of every effort to improve how we deliver services to strengthen families and keep children safe.

A learning culture built on research, data and reporting

Strengthening the service system

The State Government is working to evaluate and inform the effectiveness of intervention programs. This work is helping to inform the Aboriginal Affairs Executive Committee's Vulnerable Families working group to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and families. The DPC Office for Data Analytics

(ODA) has two members on the Vulnerable Families working group and contributes regular updates on data analytic activities.

ODA is also continuing to engage and provide advice to the South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations Network (SAACCON) regarding data sovereignty. Work has commenced on a community data project – led by SAACCON with support from ODA – that will strengthen data capabilities of participating ACCOs in the western suburbs. This work is a significant part of reforms underway for the South Australian implementation plan for Closing the Gap.

A national approach

The State Government is also working with other jurisdictions to refine reporting definitions to enable reporting on child protection outcomes. In collaboration with jurisdictions, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has progressed the development of agreed national definitions and technical specifications for the collection of new national data on safety in care. The relevant data items have been incorporated into the Child Protection National Minimum Data Set, with collection of this data occurring in September 2021. Work is progressing on the development of national analyses of safety in care data and the associated reporting products, with the AIHW and the Children and Families Data Network (CAFDaN) facilitating Safety in Care workshops with states and territories in July 2023.

Research to inform practice

To ensure system improvements are evidence-based and practice-informed, the State Government is partnering with a range of researchers.

Through the Australian Centre for Child Protection (ACCP) a new program of work focused on research and research translation activities to improve responses to harmful sexual behaviours (HSB) is in progress.

In addition, the State Government has a partnership with the ACCP to support the Enhancing Practice PhD Scholarship program. \$1.25m has been contributed to support new and innovative ways to deliver better outcomes for vulnerable children and young people. The program in 2022-23 supports seven different PhD students research projects including responding to trauma and mental health, building therapeutic practice, enhancing reunification practice and creating sustainable partnerships with Aboriginal stakeholders' projects.

The State Government also works together with the University of Adelaide's Better Start Health and Development Research Unit work to provide in-kind support for a PhD intern. The specialist research being undertaken seeks to better understand the mental health needs of young people in out of home care and how their mental health could be better supported. This includes key points of contact with the health system when young people enter care, and when they transition from care and into adulthood.

\$122.4k is also being contributed over four years to the Concept of Home project, a partnership with Anglicare, Life Without Barriers and Flinders University. The project aims to understand how the concept of 'home' can be used to improve responsiveness to children and young people's needs in care. Expected outcomes include developing and evaluating home-centred care principles, practice guidelines and an online training module with the goals of improving experiences and placement stability for children and young people.

Governance and accountability

Child protection expert group

To progress in building a robust child protection and family support system for the future, we must make best use of cutting edge research and expertise available to us. With this in mind, the South Australian Child Protection Expert Group was formed in April 2023 to offer guidance on a long-term vision to transform the state's child protection and family support system.

The expert group is led by Professor Leah Bromfield and comprises government and non-government members from across Australia who have recognised expertise in child protection and family support research, policy and practice.

The expert group has been tasked with leading a range of actions including:

- > improving child protection response models and quality of practice
- > developing and implementing a 20-year vision for transforming child protection and family support
- > enhancing therapeutic responses and targeted interventions
- > improving out of home care support for young people
- > convening a child protection symposium.

The first meeting of the group was held in May 2023.

Child Protection Governance Group

The State Government has established a new cross-government Chief Executive Governance Group. The group, chaired by the Minister for Child Protection, comprises of Chief Executives from relevant state government agencies including:

- > Department for Child Protection
- > Department of the Premier and Cabinet
- > Attorney-General's Department
- > Department of Treasury and Finance
- > Department for Health and Wellbeing
- > Department of Human Services
- > Department for Education
- > South Australia Police
- > SA Housing Authority.

The group is responsible for assisting to develop and drive an integrated, effective and sustainable whole of government approach to strategic child protection and family support reform in South Australia. This includes both immediate action and engagement with a long-term vision.

It has a focus on the impact of reform and outcomes delivered for Aboriginal children and young people, their families and communities. This includes consideration of actions being pursued across government to deliver on target 12 under Closing the Gap. The group held its first meeting in April 2023, and is scheduled to meet at least quarterly over the year ahead.

Collectively these new governance and advisory structures provide a firm foundation to improve outcomes for children through building a child protection and family support system for the future with children and young people at the centre.

Next steps

Children and young people must be at the centre of our whole of government, whole of community and whole of sector efforts.

We are committed to taking bold action to strengthen families, support children and young people in care to thrive and to break the intergenerational cycle of contact with the child protection system.

In developing the successor to Safe and well, over the coming year we will continue to engage with partners and the community to actively listen to their views on how we can build the child protection system of the future. Hearing from children, young people, carers, the sector and the community will be critical to ensuring we focus our efforts on the right things in our next whole of government child protection strategy to keep children safe.



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