

# Carer Voices: Focus Area 1

## Building Effective Partnerships



### Communication

**Don't talk about us, without us.**

*Foster carer*

**Sometimes it is hard to get hold of my agency when there is an issue.**

*Agency carer*

**Communication between Communities, agency and carer is fantastic, we get joint emails, timely responses, and I know we are all getting the same information at the same time.**

*Agency carer*

**Communities and agencies withhold information from each other, there is no clarity about whether information can be shared or even if carers can contact Communities directly.**

*Agency carer*

**I was told I cannot have direct contact with Communities.**

*Agency carer*

**I am quite happy with the way things work now. If I need things I know who to contact, and it gets done.**

*Foster carer*

**If you think about the ingredients for a cake, communication is like milk, it is the thing that sticks it all together.**

*Family carer*

**I have the same Communities Caseworkers for both children in my care and same agency Caseworkers which makes for 1 layer – seamless, works well.**

*Agency carer*



### Relationship Building

**Help carers network with each other more efficiently.**

*Agency carer*

**I think this is coming into place now with changing to a new district. The new Caseworkers is actually taking time to build a relationship with our family.**

*Agency carer*

**I have found Caseworkers to be helpful – establishing a clear understanding at the beginning of the working relationship is helpful.**

*Foster carer*

**Not knowing if the messages I give my Case Worker (agency) get through to Department Case Worker.**

*Agency carer*

**Morning teas are fine, but we want more involvement.**

*Foster carer*

**We have to go through a 3rd person.**

*Agency carer*

**I would like to see biological children respected and included as they are carers too.**

*Foster carer*

**'Cut red tape' and contact Departmental Case Worker direct – so long as everyone kept informed there should be no problems.**

*Agency carer*



### Planning in Partnership

**Opportunity to work directly alongside and face to face with the rest of the team.**

*Foster carer*

**I understand policies but sometimes we need to focus on what's best for the child.**

*Agency carer*

**Have [the care team approach] verbally explained when carers start caring for children. I was provided with a booklet about it when I became a carer but the information was overwhelming and unclear at times – short.**

*Short-break carer*

**The Care Team Approach is not working well, that means children in care are not getting what they need, when they need it.**

*Foster carer*

**Can't speak highly enough of case worker and placement officer they listen to the kids and to me, we listen to each other.**

*Foster carer*

**The teams I've worked with have always been amazing.**

*Foster carer*

**As carers we have worked hard to develop relationship with Case Workers and Department, we often have some history with the family, we want to be involved in developing the child's pathway back home.**

*Agency carer*

**When the team works well together, everyone, including the child, benefits.**

*Agency carer*

## Carer Voices: Focus Area 2

### Strengthening carer capability and confidence



#### Capability and Capacity in the Workforce

**It hurts to see staff under so much pressure.**

*Significant other carer*

**Initially the Caseworker was very thorough and made regular home visits then reality hits and they can't do what they say they will do.**

*Foster carer*

**A good Caseworker is crucial to successful planning and decision making.**

*Agency carer*

**Get help for the Caseworkers so they are not so overworked and can actually do their job properly.**

*Agency carer*

**I feel sorry for them (Communities Caseworkers).**

*Foster carer*

**Some of the new Communities Caseworkers are young, inexperienced, arrogant and dismissive which makes the carer feel undervalued, underpaid and just a glorified babysitter.**

*Agency carer*

**I try not to bother the Caseworker unless critical.**

*Foster carer*

**Case managers have the hardest job to do – giving them more time/respect/support would have a great ripple effect to the carers and most importantly to the child!**

*Foster carer*



#### District Leadership

**Keep staff, look after them, support them and give them training.**

*Foster carer*

**I am happy with the District I care for, the staff are busy but professional.**

*Foster carer*

**Overall I have great case managers and great teams at the moment. The way the Director runs the office seems to be working for us and I believe they are doing a great job.**

*Foster carer*

**In general I have found the Department has been very good and supportive.**

*Foster carer*

**Staff don't feel supported, lack of leadership.**

*Foster carer*



#### Cultural Competency and Knowledge

**Respect parents/listen to them and learn their culture.**

*Foster carer*

**It is important children stay on country or they won't be accepted back into maternal or paternal family. If your (child) goes back home you don't fit, stuck in the middle of two cultures, don't sit in either world.**

*Aboriginal family carer*

**Cultural knowledge and learning should come from family at contact.**

*Foster carer of Aboriginal children*

**The Cultural Space that is run by the Armadale APLs every fortnight it's fantastic.**

*Foster carer*

**Cultural Space is awesome.**

*Foster carer*

**We need supports to develop good relationships with safe family members, so we get information from family about extended family, cultural connections and cultural norms.**

*Foster carer*

**Protection Orders ended and the boys sent back to community. Totally different for them after being brought up metro in white community, they had no knowledge of language/Country/tradition – were picked on and made fun of; they were very unhappy.**

*Agency carer*

# Carer Voices: Focus Area 3

## Responsive and Agile System



### Responsive Case Work Practice Systems

Centrelink and NDIS processes can be confusing and complex for carers.

*Foster carer*

Staff worked better about five years ago, workers are managing too much; many criminal cases; for a Department who is about self-care of others, they do not practice it with their own staff.

*Significant other carer*

The Department have policy and practice and good intentions but don't action. Can't just keep ticking the boxes, need action.

*Foster carer*

Communities provided me with regular updates on progress of my concerns – responsiveness often comes back to Communities Caseworker experience and knowledge of processes and procedures.

*Agency carer*

Have an NDIS/disabilities informed person within the Department to support carers with appropriate information for people with disabilities.

*Foster carer*

Carers are a precious commodity looking after our most vulnerable children.

*Foster carer*



### Training and Resources

Practical strategies around behaviours, particular those children with special needs.

*Foster carer*

Training could be better if presented together – away from the office and mixing family and feneral carers, we're all carers together.

*Family carer*

Give me the flexibility to pay for items then send the receipt.

*Foster carer*

[Training is adequate] but always keen to learn new things that can help support the little ones in my care.

*Foster carer*

No foster carer group – under the impression you don't want us to meet.

*Foster carer*

I would like some more behaviour management courses please.

*Family carer*

Training focussed on the kids is good. Training with the other adults so we can learn how to work together effectively would be helpful.

*Foster carer*

More training in FASD, support available for disabled kids, recognising trauma and supporting traumatised children.

*Agency carer*



### Recruitment and Assessment

Prioritise family for connection to culture...explore extended family for respite.

*Aboriginal family carer*

Let carers know their entitlements at assessment.

*Foster carer*

If you look after your carers the child will go well, carers need to be in a strong position to care for children well.

*Agency carer*

Permanency planning (Stability and Connection) should become law, should be easier for Special Guardianship Orders or adoption, especially when older kids want permanency.

*Foster carer*

The requirements for assessment prior to caring are the equivalent of stripping yourself and your family naked and parading in front of strangers.

*Agency carer*

Demographics have changed, need to make it explicit in recruitment that same sex couples and single people are able to be assessed as foster carers.

*Foster carer*

Be more honest with prospective carers about what to expect. The newbies still come through expecting their perfect family to be completed the minute they're ticked off.

*Agency carer*

Family carers have it tough, have attachment to the child and added pressure from family to take the child.

*Family carer*

## Carer Voices: Focus Area 3

### Responsive and Agile System



#### Leaving Care

It was impossible to find information about (young persons) leaving care plan.

*Foster carer*

[Young people] leaving care should have life skills training and supports for budgeting, be job ready etc.

*Foster carer*

Get Special Guardian Order, Department cuts you off. Everyone wants their kids out of welfare, but they still need so much.

*Aboriginal family carer*



#### Regional and Remote Communities

Can't do the job on your own, need to be working as part of a team.

*Foster carer*

Organisation tries to do everything ... suggest a carer support group to alleviate pressure of Caseworker role and they can focus on children in care.

*Foster carer*

Better when Aboriginal staff are involved – (they are) able to communicate (with family) but be firm.

*Aboriginal family carer*

## Staff Voices

So much of the case manager's role is now paper-based which means they are at their desks having to meet 'compliance' and reporting requirements. This reduces the amount of time they can spend with families and carers, building strong relationships and communicating changes/information in an informal way.

The decision to dissolve the dedicated carer support team has had a real impact from the carers' perspective as the responsibility and co-ordination of carer support, including training, gatherings and carer reviews and support by a dedicated team was lost to the extent it became reliant on individual team leaders management.

We need to get better at supporting carers especially with traumatised children. So pleased to hear from carers. No surprises – communication is key to positive relationship building. Carers do not feel respected when they are not consulted as part of decision making and relationship building takes time. Also carers are desperate for support around cultural issues as most are not confident how best to meet these children's needs.

Implementing and maintaining strategies to keep carer support and validation at the forefront. In the day to day, this sometimes slips and we know that we need to do this better.

Keep advocating for streamlining of administrative processes.

Carers are a critical resource in supporting children in care and should be acknowledged as an important part of the Care Team. Options for training for carers can include the option of developing those interested in being professional therapeutic carers who can be developed as a dedicated district resource for caring for children with high and complex needs.

More supports to family carers who in many cases have not chosen to care for the child and rather feel obliged to do it. These carers do not have the same understanding of fostering and the child's needs/trauma related behaviours.

I think that the feedback [from carers] is consistent with what we hear directly from carers in the region. These are the same challenges that staff and case managers also report.

Prioritisation of supporting carers, making them feel a valued member of a collaborative team. Supporting carers seems like it is only the role of certain positions.

What would be beneficial would be a worker that answers directly to the District Director, whose role it is to support carers without agenda. This would allow a direct line of feedback to District Directors (outside the normal team structure) and also have a pastoral care aspect.

There is no cap on the number of carers that can be assigned to a placement officer. There are workers carrying over 50 carers to their name. Best practice while ideal, is not possible, and often we are reduced to "putting out spot fires" rather than doing good, in-depth practice.

[At the moment we have] little time to arrange social events which was a fulfilling part of the role and you could see the benefits amongst the carers of networking with each other.

It has been useful to complete an appreciative inquiry with carers where they are provided the opportunity to describe something that has gone well and to affirm with staff what they did was positive and helpful so they can do more of those behaviours.



**Notes:**





Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Communities**