

POLICY FUTURES

A Reform Agenda



Peer Parent and Family Advocacy in Child Protection: A pathway to better outcomes for kids

Despite success overseas, peer parent and family advocacy remains almost entirely absent from Australian child protection systems. The green shoot initiatives that are emerging are new and vulnerable.

However, implementation more broadly is very achievable if properly supported. Peer advocacy can be readily integrated into our system, is cost effective and will make a significant and long lasting difference.

Jessica Cocks

2016 Churchill Fellow, New South Wales

Key Policy Recommendations

1

Peer parent and family policy advocacy. The Australian Government should support and lead the development of parent and family advisory mechanisms in child protection and out-of-home care with a particular emphasis on participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The Queensland Department of Child Safety provides an example for others to follow. They have partnered with the Queensland Family Inclusion Network to set up Australia's first ever Parent Advisory Committee (QPAC). The QPAC advises the Minister and her Department on child protection policy. It also provides feedback and advice about practice developments including the implementation of the Department's practice framework – Strengthening Families, Protection Children. The QPAC is bringing the experiences of parents and family directly to the policy process, providing feedback on policy implementation and modelling a respectful partnership with families.

2

Peer parent and family casework advocacy. The Australian Government should fund innovative trials in parent and family casework advocacy to test their efficacy in the Australian context. Child protection authorities and non-government organisations should partner with parent and family led organisations to design and implement peer parent and family advocacy initiatives to help individual parents and family participate in child protection processes, increase safe reunification and reduce stays in out-of-home care. These initiatives should be trialled for a minimum of five years and then moved to scale based on evaluation outcomes. It is suggested these occur in locations where emerging peer initiatives and parent and family leadership already exist such as in the Hunter Valley of New South Wales, in Perth and in Queensland.

3

Interdisciplinary legal services based on the New York City Models. The Australian Government fund state based Legal Aid Commissions and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services to trial interdisciplinary legal services, based on the New York City model, inclusive of peer advocates. This model has increased reunification rates and reduced stays in care. It is suggested these also be trialled in locations where emerging peer initiatives and parent and family leadership already exist and be accompanied by evaluation.

Ms Jessica Cocks
Life without Barriers
T +61 429 004 450
E jessica.cocks@lwb.org.au



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