

# DoCS

## foundations for change

Reforming Care and Support



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## A MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER for Community Services

A great deal has been achieved since the NSW Government announced its decision to invest an extra \$1.2 billion in the NSW child protection system two years ago, an investment in the future of thousands of families and children across NSW.

As a result, the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS) is delivering a program of reform and renewal that spans almost every aspect of the services it provides and funds.

We have an unprecedented opportunity to improve the child protection system in this State.

Our aim is to promote preventative services that can improve future prospects for many children, help keep families together and save lives.

This will take time. In the meantime we must also focus on building services to help and protect children at risk.

DoCS has been busy laying the foundations for an expanded and improved service system. DoCS is doubling its caseworker workforce, setting up new services for families and children, fixing its systems and changing the way work is done. Most of the real building work will take place between now and 2008.

The Government recently consolidated a number of programs from other agencies in a new communities division in DoCS. These programs are focused on building resilient, safe and healthy communities. The division now plays the lead role in this area for the NSW Government with its partners in local government, the non-government sector and other agencies.

We can only succeed in reforming and rebuilding a system of care and support with the patience and participation of staff and external stakeholders. I take this opportunity to thank them for their ongoing commitment, determination and dedication. The work they do is often difficult, complex and emotionally draining. They deal with some of society's most vulnerable people and it will never be possible to solve every problem in every household.

But we must continue to strengthen our service system. We are fortunate to have this opportunity to make real and lasting change.

We can look forward to a vastly improved 'DoCS experience' for NSW families, parents, carers, relatives and children in NSW.

**The Hon. Carmel Tebbutt MLC**  
Minister for Community Services  
Minister for Ageing  
Minister for Disability Services  
Minister for Youth

# the REFORM PACKAGE

In December 2002, the Government committed to a \$1.2 billion increase in funding for DoCS. It is being provided in escalating amounts over five full years (2003/04-2007/08).

This followed the work of the Kibble Committee, established by the Government in May 2002. The Inquiry recommended more resources be made available to meet growing demand for DoCS services.

The Committee's findings highlighted the challenges facing DoCS. A period of exponential growth in demand for its services had not been matched by increased resources. As a result, DoCS had been forced into crisis response with only the most critical situations receiving attention.

NSW is not alone in facing increased reports of child abuse. It reflects a worldwide trend in developed countries. Contributing factors are many and complex. They include

growing public awareness and concern, drug and alcohol abuse, family stress and violence and social isolation.

The challenges for DoCS were also highlighted in reports by both the Ombudsman and the NSW Legislative Council's Standing Committee on Social Issues in 2002.

The package announced by the NSW Minister for Community Services in December 2002 addressed the Kibble Committee's recommendations for increased caseworker resources with a program to employ an

additional 875 caseworkers over five years from 2003/04.

The package also responded to growing international evidence, and the findings of the Standing Committee on Social Issues, by significantly expanding early intervention and prevention services.

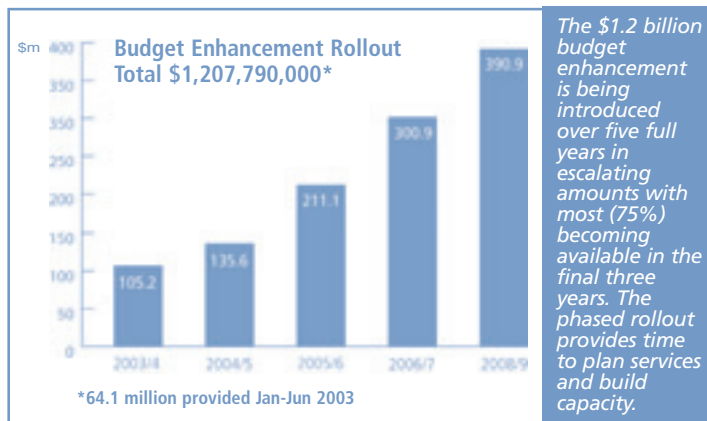
Providing appropriate support services as soon as risk factors are identified in a family will help to prevent them reaching the point where a statutory child protection response is required.

In addition, out-of-home care services will be boosted by more than \$600 million.



“ Tragically there will always be parents who harm their children, and there will always be non-accidental child deaths. The challenge for contemporary child protection systems is to find ways to prevent abuse and neglect, while providing the necessary interventions and supports for children and young people already at risk of harm and abuse. There must be a balance of prevention and intervention.”

Standing Committee on Social Issues, Final Report, Care and Support, 2002



## NEW CASEWORKERS AND SUPPORT STAFF

DoCS began its biggest ever recruitment drive in late 2003, to employ the first 150 of more than 875 new caseworkers - 375 for child protection, 350 for early intervention and 150 for out-of-home care. Managers and clerical staff are also being recruited to support them, along with up to 30 psychologists and 28 legal officers.

As a result of the first recruitment round, DoCS had 173 more caseworkers in June 2004 than in June 2003. We will continue our bulk recruitment campaign until 2008.

By September 2004, we finished recruiting nine legal officers who are now providing

extra support in 23 locations. In 2005/06 we will recruit up to eight more positions.

To ensure a future supply of suitably qualified professionals, we are working with universities to promote social work and other careers with DoCS. We are also implementing targeted workforce strategies such as enhanced study assistance.

### PHASED ROLLOUT

It is not practical or possible to recruit and accommodate all of the new caseworkers at once so we are expanding our CSCs, location-by-location. Most CSCs will be reconfigured or relocated to accommodate the new staff.

Decisions about the order in which CSCs and their surrounding areas receive new resources are based on a range of factors including child protection data, local demographics and practical considerations such as availability of suitable office accommodation. The number of new caseworkers at each CSC varies according to local needs and will be reviewed as these needs change.

New caseworkers have started work at Bankstown, Blacktown, Maitland, Tweed Heads, Epping, Campbelltown and Gosford. More CSCs will be expanded in 2005.

“ I've been involved in child development for 18 years now as a lecturer and with original training as a primary school teacher. I'm enjoying casework, where I work face-to-face with families and children. It's an exciting time to join DoCS because there's been an injection of funds for new programs and DoCS can put more caseworkers in the field to support families. This makes it easier for caseworkers to do their job.”

Angela Cowan, Caseworker, Maitland

Angela is one of DoCS' new caseworkers appointed in 2003/04.

# Getting in early



**P**revention and early intervention strategies can reduce child abuse and neglect.

They reduce the likelihood of family problems escalating into crises. They strengthen people's ability to cope with problems by building stronger links between individuals, families and communities. They promote positive relationships and build stronger, healthier children.

Over the long term, early intervention reduces demand for services that might otherwise be needed further down the track, such as child protection, corrective or rehabilitation services or mental health.

DoCS' new Early Intervention Program will provide new services for vulnerable families. It

includes \$150 million in new funding for community based services such as centre-based child care, supported play groups, home visiting, parenting programs, centre and home-based family support services and school preparation services.

These new services will work with DoCS' early intervention caseworkers at a local level to provide coordinated support to vulnerable families.

We have recruited the first group of caseworkers and begun the funding rollout. In May 2004, we provided \$6.5 million for 45 projects. In September, we invited expressions of interest worth a further \$6.6 million. The initial focus has been on services for Bankstown, Blacktown, Maitland and Tweed Heads.

More services will be set up as the program is rolled out across NSW between now and 2008.

DoCS has established a reference group made up of external stakeholders to guide and monitor the program.

## Services funded under the DoCS Early Intervention Program to date include:

- two new childcare workers in Bankstown to coordinate specialist care and support for children. DoCS has also funded childcare places to assist families participating in the program
- new places in a program in Western Sydney for parents experiencing problems such as mental illness, alcohol and

drugs, family violence and disabilities. The program provides them with opportunities to build their parenting skills and confidence

- a new resource centre at Banora Point, Tweed Heads to provide families with access to family workers, therapists and visiting specialist staff. It will also provide a base for other activities like parenting programs and playgroups
- a new family centre at Woodberry, Maitland from which several family services will operate. It will work alongside a local schools-as-community centre already established under the Government's universal prevention initiative, *Families First*.

## PREVENTION WORKS PREVENTION WORKS PREVENTION WORKS PREVENTION WORKS

**A** great deal of research demonstrates short and long term benefits of providing early support to children and families.

- Long-term studies have shown early intervention programs can improve intellectual development, school adjustment, educational outcomes and employment chances. They can also improve parent-child relationships.
- Quality home visiting services benefit children and parents, particularly first-time mothers. A 15-year US study showed adolescents, whose mothers had been visited when their children were very young, were significantly less likely than their peers to run away, be arrested or use drugs.
- Parenting programs reduce child behaviour problems

and parental stress, and improve confidence.

- Children from disadvantaged backgrounds who received two-and-a-half hours of high quality care, five days a week for just 30 weeks a year, have demonstrated cognitive, social and emotional gains well into adulthood and are less likely to commit violent crimes or be arrested than their peers.
- Children who are assisted to make a smooth transition to school and who experience early school success tend to maintain high levels of social competence and academic achievement.
- Multi-component programs that target both parents and children are more effective than any single intervention.

"We can now provide extra support for a young mum, who has no family support and faces financial hardship. We can prevent her situation from slipping by linking her with services like housing, a playgroup and the local community nurse. We can help her with life skills, such as budgeting and arm her with knowledge so she's better equipped to lead her life in her new role as a mother. We can increase the likelihood that she'll continue her education. It could change the future for her and her child."

Elly Haynes, Orange Family Support Service

**Orange Family Support Service is one of 45 organisations provided with funding in 2004 under DoCS' Early Intervention Program.**

# STRENGTHENING THE OUT-OF-HOME CARE SYSTEM



## professionalising the WORKFORCE

A highly skilled workforce is critical to good service delivery.

To boost casework skills, DoCS recently upgraded the minimum entry-level caseworker qualification from a diploma to a degree and is investing heavily in learning and development for existing staff.

Over the past 12 months we have put more than 420 new and existing caseworkers through our 35-day caseworker development course and expanded our study assistance program. We've also put planning, performance and review agreements in place, containing professional development programs, for every single staff member.

New procedures and tools are being developed to guide staff in their decisions about how individual cases should be handled. This will improve the consistency of the services clients receive, from one CSC to another.

DoCS has also launched a new program to build staff knowledge about latest research evidence and best practice (see Better Evidence Base, p9).

**A**round half of the budget enhancement will improve and strengthen out-of-home care in NSW.

### Legislation

By March 2004, the majority of the out-of-home care provisions of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* had commenced.

One important change was a new requirement that organisations providing out-of-home care services obtain accreditation by the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian. DoCS has been working with the Children's Guardian to develop standards, tools and policies for accreditation.

Another important change to the Act now enables authorised carers to apply for sole parental responsibility for children in their care.

### More Services

Out-of-home care services will be significantly expanded so they can be better matched to meet the varied needs of children and young people who cannot live at home.

In July 2004, DoCS issued a paper for sector consultation, *Framework for the Future of Out-of-Home Care in NSW*. It outlined a way forward for developing a range of new services, some of which DoCS will provide and others which it will fund. Most of the funding for the new services will be rolled out in the later stages of the budget enhancement.

In November 2004, we announced new funding for eight services to support children and young people with high and complex needs. This will ensure better outcomes for this vulnerable group.

### Out-of-home care caseworkers

DoCS' initial intake of 36 new out-of-home care caseworkers is almost complete. The new

caseworkers will work with children and young people with high and complex needs. Teams are also being established in regions across the State to work with children in foster, relative and kinship care and to recruit, train and support carers.

### Foster carers

With expanded foster care teams, we will increase our ability to recruit and support carers. Finding and keeping suitable carers is an ongoing challenge for DoCS and other foster care agencies.

We recently released a socio-demographic study about foster carers. The study was undertaken to find out more about the people who choose to provide this valuable service and about how we can better support them.

We are also undertaking a major review of our carer allowances and contingency payments system to ensure it is appropriately targeted, equitable and consistently applied across the State.

### Intercountry Adoption

The intercountry adoption system is being reformed so that non-government agencies are able to provide intercountry adoption services alongside DoCS. A new accreditation process is being introduced which will ensure all adoption agencies meet minimum standards. DoCS is reforming its own intercountry adoption services to streamline processes, reduce waiting times and improve training for prospective adoptive parents. In addition, DoCS' intercountry adoption fees have been increased to enable non-government service providers to operate effectively. Fee concessions are available for adoptive parents who need assistance.



## EXTRA SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS FAMILIES

**I**ndigenous children are over represented in child protection reports and in out-of-home care.

An Aboriginal Services Branch has been established to improve policy, practice and service delivery. Its work ranges from helping to develop new, targeted services to increasing our ability to provide culturally appropriate services through the people we employ.

Two new Aboriginal services in Bourke and Dapto are being set up to provide intensive support to families with children who have been reported to DoCS, where the children are at risk of being removed from their families. Family workers will help parents to create a safer environment for their children by helping them with practical issues

such as parenting skills; drug, alcohol and violence management; shopping; nutrition and family budgeting. The new services will open in early 2005.

In addition, \$3.5 million is being invested over three years from 2003 to increase out-of-home care services for Indigenous children and young people, including an additional 100-150 foster care places. This is the largest ever injection of funds into Indigenous foster care services in NSW.

In addition, we are planning new services specifically for Indigenous children, young people and their families and carers under our early intervention and out-of-home care programs, and developing cultural awareness training for DoCS staff.

## Aboriginal Cadetships

DoCS received 17 applications this year for its Aboriginal Cadetship Program, the highest number ever received by a NSW department. Six positions were advertised for Indigenous university students in psychology, law, social work and social welfare. Successful applicants will receive a study allowance during the academic year. They will also gain valuable work experience working with DoCS for 12 weeks during their university holidays.

## CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

DoCS has established a Multicultural Services Unit to boost support for families and staff from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. In addition, we are developing a *Good Practice Guide for Working With Culturally and Linguistically Diverse People and Communities*.

This year we received more staff nominations for the community language allowance scheme than any other NSW agency. This means DoCS staff are available to assist clients who speak languages other than English.

# PURCHASING REFORM

Each year DoCS provides approximately \$400 million (or approximately 40 per cent of its budget) to nearly 2000 community organisations that provide a range of essential services such as counselling, family support, foster care and early intervention. This funding increases as the budget enhancement is rolled out

so DoCS is reforming its purchasing processes to ensure the right services are available in the right places, to those who need them most.

We are developing new service quality standards around areas such as governance, client access, service delivery and organisational management. New service specifications are being

developed with descriptions of required services, outcomes and performance indicators. We have also launched a new training program specifically for non-government organisations.

New principles and practices have been developed for setting and paying indexation to funded programs. In addition, we are piloting a new project to

allow electronic information exchange between DoCS and NGOs to streamline performance monitoring and service evaluation.

DoCS has recruited an additional 35 new partnerships and planning staff who are currently working with local communities to set up and coordinate new services for the future.

## BUILDING communities

In July 2004, a new Communities Division was created in DoCS comprising a number of programs transferred from other agencies including: Families First, Community Solutions, Area Assistance Scheme, Strengthening Communities programs, Better Futures, the Aboriginal Child Youth & Family Strategy and Youth Policy, Partnership and Participation.

The Violence Against Women program will be transferred to the Division from the Attorney General's Department of NSW in February 2005.

These programs are diverse but all focus on working in

partnership to build resilient, safe and healthy communities. Combining them in one unit re-enforces their capacity to deliver good outcomes through a whole-of-government approach.

The whole-of-government approach to the programs will be retained through the Communities Division's reports to the Human Services CEOs' Committee.

A new reference group, comprising representatives from non-government organisations, other government agencies and academic experts is being established to inform the Division's work.



## Boosting investigative teams

DoCS has specialist caseworkers that work as part of joint DoCS, NSW Police and Health teams to investigate sexual abuse and serious physical abuse and neglect, where criminal conduct may be involved. These Joint Investigation Response Teams (JIRTs) are being strengthened with 35 new casework staff. Seventeen caseworkers were recruited in 2003/04. DoCS plans to recruit the remainder in 2005/06.

In metropolitan areas, JIRT police and DoCS staff are co-located. We are now getting ready to trial co-located JIRTs in rural areas. We have recruited staff for a pilot in Tamworth which will start operating in December 2004. We are also reviewing JIRT procedures to improve the way these critical cases are investigated, assessed and responded to.



# DoCS' Culture



## Stakeholder relations

To improve communication, exchange of information and relationships, we have set up external stakeholder reference groups and a new stakeholder forum. We are also emphasising stakeholder consultation and communication skills in new project and policy training for staff.

We launched an improved stakeholder publication, *Inside Out*, in August 2003 as well as a new website in May 2004. We plan to make significant advances in community education in coming years.

## Management culture

A positive internal culture supports people in their work and benefits DoCS and clients.

CSC management positions have been reclassified and redefined to reflect the need for

enhanced leadership and community relations skills. We have also provided management development training to frontline managers to improve supervisory skills throughout DoCS. Further training is planned in 2005.

Under DoCS' new planning, performance and review agreements, supervisors and staff are now required to meet regularly to discuss current work and any difficulty they face or support that is required.

We have also developed and started implementing a strategic plan to improve workplace health and safety.

DoCS has also made significant efforts to improve its relationship with the Public Service Association and undertakes high level consultation before introducing changes that affect staff.

“ I want staff to come to work every day, confident that they are respected and supported, personally and professionally. This means giving people opportunities and choices. A happy workforce ultimately means better client service.”

Neil Shepherd,  
Director-General, DoCS

# Fixing IT systems

Streamlined, well-functioning systems are critical for any organisation. DoCS is replacing a number of outdated, inefficient information technology (IT) systems. Fixing these in preparation for an expanded organisation and workload has been a primary focus over the past 18 months.

DoCS has replaced its outdated client management system with a new Key Information and Directory System (KiDS). KiDS reflects the latest child protection legislation and will improve the management of child protection reports and information on children and young people in care. Unlike the old system, it can be

expanded to accommodate our future requirements. We transferred some 24 million records to the new system and provided more than 6,000 days of staff training. Ongoing quarterly updates are being made to improve speed and functionality.

In addition, we have started a rolling upgrade of IT systems to improve speed, efficiency and functionality, which includes new hardware, software and Internet access.

A new records and document management program is under development and implementation should commence in 2005. This will improve record keeping and file tracking. A corporate



information warehouse is also being developed to hold activity and performance data.

DoCS has also introduced a new human resources system to streamline common HR tasks and improve the quality and availability of information for management and staff.

Replacing our old systems requires a significant initial investment but this is quickly offset by significantly improved efficiencies in our day-to-day work, in ongoing IT maintenance, and in faster and better information systems that will ultimately reduce delays and improve services.

# Improving INTAKE and ASSESSMENT

DoCS is reviewing processes for its approach to incoming child protection reports (initial risk assessment). We are investigating ways to make the process more comprehensive, to improve our focus on the highest priority cases and to bring greater consistency to our decision-making about services or responses that children or their families might need. A review was completed this year of national and international systems and how they

might be applied in NSW. DoCS is currently investigating several options.

In early 2005, DoCS is also planning to trial online e-reporting for a small group of mandatory reporters.

In December 2004, we launched a trial of new case closure procedures. The aim is to introduce greater rigour and consistency in determining which cases will not receive a DoCS response due to resource constraints.

## IMPROVING Systems, Standards and Practice

**D**oCS needs a robust way to ensure continual improvement to internal systems, professional standards and practice.

In March 2004, we established a new Complaint, Assessment and Review Branch to centralise and coordinate the management of complaints against DoCS staff and foster carers and to provide a credible, consistent way to learn from the deaths of particular children.

A new framework is currently being developed, which will facilitate more effective and timely management, review and investigation of complaints against staff and foster carers. Accompanying procedures have been drafted to facilitate compliance with the requirements of oversight agencies such as the NSW Ombudsman and the Coroner.

“Caseworkers from both the Out-of-Home Care and Child Protection teams are telling me how glad they are that I’m here in the office on a day-to-day basis. Their queries range from permission for our kids to have their ears pierced to laws of evidence. They are also finding my assistance with their subpoenas and affidavits and general court preparation invaluable. I have a strong, personal commitment to the welfare and wellbeing of children, and I am enjoying the opportunity to support the caseworkers in their work. I feel having a solicitor in the CSC is already making a big difference.”

Libby Goss, Legal Officer,

*Libby Goss started work in August 2004 at Penrith and St Marys CSCs. She is one of nine new legal officers recruited this year, who are now supporting caseworkers in 23 locations across NSW.*

# Better EVIDENCE Base

**R**esearch, information and evaluation are necessary to understand the big picture impacts of legislative and policy changes, reforms, new initiatives and social trends.

DoCS has established a new Economics, Research and Information Directorate to build a better evidence base so we can improve our understanding of the social and financial costs and benefits of the work we do and fund. In particular, the benefits of our programs are far reaching and need to be better understood.

We need to ensure that proposed changes to policies, programs and practice are properly costed and their impacts fully assessed. We need to understand why people come into contact with the child protection system. This can be done only with relevant, high quality data and we have developed an Information Quality Framework to improve the quality and accessibility of our data.

A Research Advisory Council, comprising experts in the child protection, child development, social policy, health and education fields has been established to advise on child and family-related research undertaken by DoCS. We have also published a strategic research agenda of projects for 2004/05.

In July 2004, DoCS launched a new ‘Research to Practice’ program to ensure that latest research evidence and best practice is incorporated into our services, from policy and

program development to casework. This includes strategies to make research relevant to staff and community partners. ‘Research to Practice’ will establish a research network to link researchers, practitioners and policy staff and will organise seminars, discussion forums, and workshops as well as producing summary papers and fact sheets.

“An opportunity to plan and fund ongoing research is crucial in helping DoCS and non-government organisations to provide more effective services. It is particularly exciting to see a new landmark study being planned to track the pathways and outcomes of children coming into out of home care. Understanding more about what makes a difference to how they fare in care or after returning home has the potential to influence policy and practice and result in better experiences and outcomes for these children and young people.”

Dr Judy Cashmore, Associate Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Sydney, Honorary Research Associate, Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW

*Dr Cashmore is a member of the DoCS Research Advisory Council.*

# Milestones

## 2002

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### December

- Minister announces \$1.2 billion budget enhancement

## 2003

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### January

- Bi-annual forums with stakeholders, the Minister and DoCS Director-General commenced

### February

- Sector consultation on early intervention and out-of-home care reform commenced
- *Adoption Act 2000* proclaimed

### March

- Rollout of new training courses commenced, with an emphasis on casework, management, project management, OHS and IT skills

### June

- First year of budget enhancement funding rolled out in NSW Community Services State Budget 2003/04

### July

- Provisions of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* proclaimed allowing the NSW Children's Guardian to accredit out-of-home care agencies and commence a quality improvement plan for existing providers
- Intensive family support services announced for Bourke and Wollongong

### August

- Minister chaired, and DoCS led, working group on family health and wellbeing as part of the NSW Summit on Alcohol Abuse 2003
- Child protection and early intervention expertise units commence

### September

- Occupational health and safety policy reform commenced

### October

- First bulk caseworker recruitment campaign
- New client information system implemented
- Interdepartmental Senior Officers Group formed to improve interagency response to child protection
- Aboriginal Services Branch established

### November

- DoCS Research Advisory Council established
- \$3.5 million over three years provided for Aboriginal foster care services

### December

- 35 regional partnerships and planning staff employed to plan and roll out new funding for new services and programs across NSW
- Provisions of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* proclaimed giving new rights to children, young persons, their parents and carers in relation to information and decision making
- DoCS hosts Ninth Australasian Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect

# 2004

## March

- Complaint, Assessment and Review branch established
- Provisions of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* proclaimed giving carers the ability to apply for 'sole parental responsibility'. New requirements for case review, record keeping and information provision

## April

- Review of clerical and administrative support in CSCs commenced

## May

- \$6.5 million for 45 new early intervention services provided
- Consultations commence on reform of intercountry adoption system
- New DoCS website launched

## June

- 100 high priority and early intervention caseworkers appointed
- Performance management system established and agreements put in place for all staff
- Recruitment for out-of-home care caseworkers commenced

## July

- Second bulk caseworker recruitment campaign commenced
- 51 Managers Client Service recruited into regraded positions
- New DoCS Communities Division created
- DoCS intercountry adoption fee structure revised as part of system reform
- Initial Assessment Review (stage 1) complete
- Paper on out-of-home care sector reform released
- Eight occupational health and safety facilitators recruited
- 'Research to practice' program launched

## August

- 17 JIRT staff recruited for teams in Ashfield, Liverpool, Newcastle, The Entrance, Kogarah, Parramatta, Penrith, Tamworth and Wollongong

## September

- New IT system to streamline and improve HR administration introduced
- Recruitment of new psychologists commenced
- Nine legal officers recruited to provide extra support for caseworkers in 23 locations
- \$6.6 million in funding announced for 10 new early intervention services
- Recruitment for new Aboriginal family workers for Bourke and Dapto commenced

## November

- Funding announced for eight new services to support children and young people with high and complex needs
- Socio-demographic foster care study released

## December

- Literature review to identify best practice in prevention and early intervention completed
- Consultation on arrangements for accreditation of non-government adoption service agencies and standards drafted
- Review of functions and funding of non-government agencies authorised to provide adoption services commenced
- Trial of new case closure procedures commenced

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People featured in photographs are models only.

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