



**NSW Department of
Community Services**

OUT-OF-HOME CARE SERVICE MODEL

INTENSIVE FOSTER CARE

This service model has been developed by the NSW Department of Community Services in consultation with the non government sector. The paper describes the key elements of an intensive foster care service which are considered to reflect best practice. As such, the service model is not designed to be prescriptive but should be used as a guide to current service development priorities.

For Inquiries, please contact

Out of Home Care Policy Directorate
NSW Department of Community Services
(02) 9716 2222

INTENSIVE FOSTER CARE SERVICE

Summary

There are a number of children and young people in the out of home care system with complex and high support needs who require Intensive Foster Care services. These are services which offer a greater intensity of support than general foster care services.

This paper sets out the elements of quality intensive foster care services which include:

- *High level assessment and ongoing mandatory training of foster carers;*
- *Targeted strategic recruitment campaigns;*
- *Access to intensive wraparound supports including specialist behaviour management services, counselling, health, education, mentoring and 24 hours crisis on-call support;*
- *Enhanced carer payments;*
- *Respite care options for carers; and*
- *Intensive case management.*

1. Introduction

This paper describes the key components of an intensive foster care service for high needs children and young people. A range of intensive foster care programs in both Australian and overseas contexts were reviewed in developing the elements of the model for intensive foster care. Evidence suggests that intensive foster care is an option that should be considered for a sizeable number of children and young people with complex and high support needs.

2. Current situation

The growth of quality intensive foster care is a key priority for the NSW out of home care system, to ensure that DoCS can provide effective placements and supports to children and young people with high and complex needs. It is estimated that a significant proportion of these children and young people would be most suitably placed in intensive foster care.

3. Research

The main research resources relied on to develop this model are listed in the research bibliography at the end of this paper.

4. Definition of intensive foster care

Intensive foster care is a form of foster care specifically designed to meet the needs of children and young people assessed as having complex and high support needs, or for particular groups of children (like siblings) that together present a more complex caring role, or for children and young people at critical phases in their development. Caring for such children and young people within a foster home

environment can be extremely challenging, and the level of support and training, and remuneration that needs to be offered to carers to assist them and provide them with recognition for their role is higher than in the more standard forms of foster care. Children and young people in intensive foster care are provided with intensive case management, by caseworkers who have a capped caseload, which will usually involve the coordination of a range of services and interventions that have been identified through a comprehensive process of assessment and review.

5. Aims of intensive foster care

Intensive foster care aims to:

- provide home-based placements for children and young people with complex and high support needs;
- specifically recruit, assess, train and intensively support carers to become integral members of the casework team involved in implementing strategies set out in the case plan for the child or young person; and
- provide an intensive case management service that delivers a coordinated, individualised plan of intervention based on the assessed needs of the child or young person in placement.

6. Outcomes of intensive foster care

The expected outcomes of intensive foster care include:

- recruitment of an adequately trained and supported pool of specialist carers able to competently provide care for children and young people with high support needs;
- retention of carers to minimise placement disruption and provide a range of placement options;
- matching children and young people with carers who are competent to meet their needs and are culturally and linguistically appropriate;
- recruitment of an adequately trained and supported pool of authorised carers able to competently meet the cultural and linguistic needs of children and young people in care
- a case planning process in which social, emotional, educational and health domains of children and young people are addressed;
- provision of care and support that meets the high and complex needs of children and young people;
- achievement of case plan goals through a coordinated, multi-disciplinary case planning and case management process;
- improvement in placement stability through provision of effective and timely, intensive, support to placements and the additional services that may be required by children, young people and foster carers.
- participation of the child, young person, their family and carers in decision-making is facilitated; and
- efficient management and delivery of services.

7. Key components of an intensive foster care service

Intensive foster care aims to deliver a coordinated plan of casework and therapeutic intervention within a community based environment for children and young people with high support needs. These placements will be characterised by:

- Carers who are specifically recruited and provided with comprehensive training to equip them to effectively respond to the needs and manage the behaviour of children and young people placed with them;
- Carers either retaining the status of volunteers or engaged as self employed contractors (both options are current practice);
- Agreement by carers that they will have only one child placed with them at any one time¹;
- Agreement by carers that they will be available to provide direct support and supervision to the child or young person in their care on a daily basis, and to attend case planning and other meetings/appointments related to the child/young person;
- The active involvement of carers in the development and implementation of the case plan for the child/young person, so that they will become, in effect, key members of the casework team for the child/young person;
- Intensive caseworker support to carers by way of frequent and regular home visits and telephone contact;
- Availability of after hours on call and call out support in the event of crises;
- Regular, planned respite care for carers and children/young people; and
- Intensive case management of the child or young person in placement.

A range of placements are required to meet the individual needs of children and young people. The type of placement that best matches needs will be determined through comprehensive assessment.

Intensive foster carers should be recruited to provide the following placements:

- **Bridging (medium-term) placements:** These focus on stabilising and preparing the child/young person for permanent placement, either within or outside their family network. For example, these placements may be used when the case plan goal indicates a move towards independent living, or restoration to the family network, or when the child/young person is subject to a time-limited Court order. The placement is designed to assist the child or young person through a package of individualised supports and services to meet assessed needs and stabilise the range of supports and interventions offered, such as behaviour management programs, access to mental health services, etc. It is envisaged that these placements will be time limited, ranging from 6 months to 24 months or longer, depending on the specific needs and case plan goals of the child/young person.

¹ There may be occasions when siblings may be placed together in an intensive foster care placement, but there would need to be a careful assessment of the capacity of the carer to adequately meet the needs of **all** the children in the sibling group, not just the child or young person identified as having the most significant problems. There may also need to be flexibility around this requirement for Aboriginal intensive foster carers due to the fluid and sometimes informal living and support arrangements in many Aboriginal families and communities.

- **Permanent care placements:** These are placements for children and young people for whom the case plan goal is permanent care. They provide an opportunity for children to form stable attachments that can persist through their childhood, thereby establishing a foundation for addressing the attachment difficulties frequently seen in children and young people with high needs.
- **Respite care placements:** Regular, planned respite care needs to be provided by a pool of specifically recruited carers. Occasions may arise when these placements could be used as short term crisis placements for children and young people in intensive foster care and for children in general foster care and relative and kinship care placements.
- **Assessment (short term) placements:** Placements, generally up to 3 months duration, in which a comprehensive needs assessment and child/carer matching process can occur.

8. Management and staffing

Services are responsible for recruiting appropriate skilled and experienced staff and for providing effective staff management and supervision that facilitate stable placements to ensure the safety and well being of children and young people in their care.

9. Recruitment, assessment, training, retention and support of carers

9.1 Recruitment of carers

The Intensive Foster Care service will develop strategies to recruit carers, specifically undertaking community placements to meet the needs of the target group, considering the need to:

- target couples or individuals with the competencies to effectively care for and support children and young people with complex and/or high support needs, such as challenging behaviour, disability, mental health or drug and alcohol issues, or serious risk or self-harm or harm to others, or who are part of a sibling group in care.
- recruit carers whose own children are either no longer living at home or are considerably older than the target group of children and young people;
- recruit carers who undertake not to accept placement of other children and young people for the duration of the placement made by the intensive foster care service;
- recruit carers who understand that one adult needs to be readily available at all times to supervise the child or young person, attend meetings and appointments in relation to the child or young person in their care, and may need to ensure that their hours of employment allow them to fulfil this obligation;
- target carers from relevant backgrounds and with the competencies to meet the diverse needs of children and young people requiring placement. Diversity of backgrounds and competencies should include those relevant to children and young people of Aboriginal and diverse cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds. Specific strategies may need to be developed to recruit these carers; and

- meet the identified number of placements within the geographical areas.

9.2 Assessment and authorisation of carers

The Intensive Foster Care service will:

- undertake thorough assessments of prospective intensive foster carers, utilising, but not limited by, an assessment format such as the *Step by Step* assessment package that focuses on carers' competencies.² More detailed attention should be given to assessing particular competencies. These include: managing challenging behaviour; communicating with troubled children and adolescents; the capacity to work as part of a team alongside other professionals; and managing crisis and stress;
- ensure that prospective intensive foster carers undergo full employment screening under Part 7 of the *Commission or Children and Young People Act 1998* prior to authorisation; and
- authorise foster carers in accordance with the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* and the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Regulation 2000*.

9.3 Training of carers

The Intensive Foster Care service will:

- conduct entry level training in accordance with, but not limited to, the *Shared Stories, Shared Lives Training Package for Prospective Foster Carers*³, or the *Step by Step Aboriginal Assessment* tool supplemented by more detailed information and training in areas such as managing challenging behaviour, non-violent crisis intervention, stress management;
- provide carers with information and training about the guidelines relating to abuse in care allegations;
- provide mandatory ongoing training for intensive foster carers to consolidate and extend carer knowledge and skills and promote carer well-being; and
- provide training on culturally appropriate care and cross cultural communication for children from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds and Indigenous children and young people.

9.4 Establish placements

The Intensive Foster Care service will:

- develop and implement intake and assessment processes that facilitate the matching of children and young people with suitable carers, and promote the successful establishment of the placement;

² Hayden, P. & Mulroney, L. (2003) *Step by Step – A competency based resource for assessing potential foster carers*. Produced by the Centre for Community Welfare Training as a project of the Association of Childrens Welfare Agencies

³ Hayden, P., Mulroney, L. & Barnes, M. (2000) *Shared Stories, Shared Lives*

9.5 Support and supervision of carers

The Intensive Foster Care service will:

- provide regular support for carers by way of home visits as required, and frequent telephone contact. The level of caseworker contact should be responsive to issues and concerns that arise throughout the duration of the placement;
- provide additional support and services to carers during critical phases which may arise from issues relating to the child/young person in their care or from issues within their own family;
- provide support to carers through the process that occurs following abuse in care allegations, at the same time ensuring the well-being of the child or young person;
- provide, or make arrangements for the provision of specialist support and advice to carers to assist them in their role (e.g. support from a psychologist, speech pathologist, medical specialist). This may reduce over the course of the placement;
- provide a 24 hour on-call and call-out crisis advisory service for carers;
- assist carers to develop peer support/network groups;
- ensure that carers receive regular planned respite care;
- conduct reviews of intensive foster carers' strengths and needs **at least every 3 months**, and at other times when circumstances within the carers' household change; and
- monitor intensive foster carers' compliance with the *Code of Conduct for Authorised Carers, Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Regulation 2000*.

10. Provision of intensive case management to high needs children and young people

Key elements of intensive case management include:

- working in collaboration with other government agencies, relevant professionals, carers, children, young people, families and appropriate cultural and community representatives to ensure a thorough needs assessment is undertaken and all relevant parties are involved in case planning;
- participating in the case planning process and implementing the case plan;
- coordinating services to best meet the developmental, health, educational, social and behavioural needs of children and young people in foster care and assisting them in developing their full potential to lead fulfilled, responsible and independent lives;

- regularly monitoring placements and reviewing case plans to ensure that plans remain relevant to the child or young person's best interests (in accordance with the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*⁴);
- undertaking casework and supervision practices with children, young people, families and carers that aim to reduce the number of unplanned placement changes;
- ensuring all placement related processes are planned and structured to facilitate a smooth transition from one placement to another and to support children, young people, families and carers;
- planning for and providing additional supports and services during critical transition stages. Such stages include the period immediately before or following a placement change, placement disruption, contact with birth families, return home, or move to independence, children entering adolescence and major life events in foster carer's family;
- working collaboratively with other agencies to ensure children and young people receive the services and supports required to meet their needs while in care;
 - facilitating access to primary and preventative health care services for each child and young person;
 - ensuring a child or young person's educational needs are met, either through mainstream schooling or alternative educational programs as appropriate and necessary to meet the needs and circumstances of the child or young person;
 - encouraging children and young people to be actively involved in community activities. This may include school, recreational, sporting, religious and cultural activities as well as any special interests;
- implementing the cultural placement principles of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*. This includes the principles relating to culture, language, religion and other components of diversity, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principles of self-determination, participation and placement⁵;
- actively promoting and supporting children and young people in maintaining and developing important and significant relationships, including sibling relationships and friendships, while they are in foster care⁶;
- facilitating contact arrangements with family members, siblings and other significant people as outlined in the case plan in order to promote the maintenance of identity, culture and religion and to meet the identified needs of children and young people;
- undertaking activities that support the child or young person in maintaining their identity through, for example, regular life story work;
- maintaining comprehensive care records and ensure the content accurately reflects the reasons why the child or young person entered into care and their life history and achievements during their period in care ;

⁴ Chapter 8, Part 2, s.150 (1) – (4) of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* requires that placements be reviewed by the designated agency supervising the placement of the child or young person in out-of-home care. The review is to be undertaken for children and young persons in out-of-home care effected by a Children's Court order within timeframes specified by s150(2) (a) and (b) of the Act and/or when there are changes to the circumstances of the placement (s.150 (2) (c) and (d) of the Act).

⁵ Sections 9 (c), 9 (e) 11,12, and 13 of the *Children and Young Person's (Care and Protection) Act 1998*

⁶ Where consistent with the case plan, and safe to do so, siblings should be placed together.

- providing timely and relevant services and support to care leavers moving back home to prevent re-entry into care; and
- arranging or providing timely and appropriate aftercare services for young people living independently

11. Participation of children, young people, families and carers

Intensive foster care services will:

- conduct genuine, ongoing consultation and facilitate participation of children, young people, and their families in the making of decisions that affect them;
- provide children, young people and their families with information (in a manner and language that they can understand) which facilitates their participation; and
- conduct genuine, ongoing consultation and facilitate participation of carers in decision-making processes.

12. Promoting the rights of children, young people and families

Intensive foster care services will:

- inform children, young people, their families and foster carers of their rights (in a manner which is appropriate to their age, developmental capacity and cultural and linguistic background). This includes information about their rights under the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* and information about complaint and appeals processes;
- provide all children and young people with the *Charter of Rights* and ensure the agency advances and complies with the Charter;
- ensure that the privacy of children, young people and their families is respected, confidentiality is maintained and information is collected and exchanged in accordance with the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*; and
- have policies and procedures in place to appropriately process complaints and appeals by children, young people and their families within clearly stated timeframes.

APPENDIX: Research Bibliography

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