

General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2
Inquiry into Child Protection

Responses of Fiona Hastings, General Manager, Families and Community, CatholicCare Sydney to
Questions on Notice from the transcript of Tuesday 16 August 2016.

Page 61

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: You can take this on notice, if you will, but do you know as a percentage how many cases, when an interim order is made and we are past the point of removal, are reinvestigated by a case worker for the purpose of deciding whether or not restoration is possible?

MS HASTINGS: I would have to take that on notice. I do not even really have a sense.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Is it common practice at all, in your view? Is it something that is routine, or is it exceptional?

MS HASTINGS: My instinct says that it is not routine and that it is somewhat exceptional. The department would be far better placed –

Answer:

Because this question references the policies and practices of the Department of Family and Community Services, I suggest that the Department is better placed to answer this question.

Page 64

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: In general, how long should the window for restoration be open?

MS HASTINGS: It depends on the age of the child and the circumstances. Any decision regarding a child can only be made individually.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: What about if the child is under eight?

Ms HASTINGS: Again it depends. An eight-year-old's needs and stages are very different to an infant's. I would suggest that the younger the child is, the shorter the window is.

Ms PALMER: You also need to consider the length of time in the long-term foster family and the age at which the child was placed. The child may not know or remember any other situation so those people are their psychological parents, and I would support the adoption.

Ms HASTINGS: The Safe Home for Life guidelines provide some clarity on that, which is that under two the decision needs to be made within six months. For children over two it is 12 months, I think. Sorry I would have to check that.

The CHAIR: Take it on notice.

Answer:

The following response is taken directly from the Department of Family and Community Services Safe Home for Life Fact Sheet on Permanent Placement Principles:

Timeframes for restorative decisions

From 29 October 2014, the Children's Court must decide if it accepts FACS assessment of whether or not there is a realistic possibility of a child or young person being restored to their family within a certain timeframe:

- *for a child less than two years of age – within six months from the time an interim care order is made by the court allocating parental responsibility to a person other than a parent*
- *for a child or young person two years of age and older – within 12 months from the time an interim care order is made by the court allocating parental responsibility to a person other than a parent.*

These timeframes guide when a decision about restoration should be made, it is not the timeframe in which restoration should occur. The court has the power to extend the timeframe when it is in the best interests of the child or young person.

Page 66

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Are you able to provide us with the figure of the proportion of people in your care who are Indigenous? We have heard a lot of views, particularly from Indigenous people we had the opportunity of hearing from earlier, as to whether or not the sector is attuned to their needs. Either now or on notice do you have any statement about what you are doing in that space? Any evaluations that you are doing or any views that you have would be most welcome.

Ms PALMER: I would say we probably have 10 out of 150 placements, but I would prefer to confirm that.

Ms HASTINGS: We would have a similar proportion. We probably have about five out of 75.

Answer:

Seven out of the 74 children and young people in CatholicCare's foster care program identify as Aboriginal. CatholicCare is supportive of the placement principles for Aboriginal children and young people articulated by the Department of Family and Community Services.

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