

# **INQUIRY INTO HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN NSW Questions on Notice**

General Purpose Standing Committee

NSW Department of Family and Community Services

Hearing: Monday 29 May 2017

**Answers due by: 26 June 2017**

**Q1: How many instances where you needed to intervene or you prevented a child (from being forcibly married)?**

Between 30 December 2014 and January 2017, the Child Protection Helpline (CPHL) received 60 reports about 57 children or young people who were considered to be at risk of Underage Forced Marriage (UFM). The NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) provides a range of services to vulnerable children and their families. The level and type of intervention will vary, depending on the identified risk. For reports of UFM, responses include making enquiries and referrals, conducting risk assessments and collaborative work with NSW Police and the Australian Federal Police.

In response to the 60 reports about 57 children or young people who were considered to be at risk of UFM, 55 of these children/young people were investigated and/or assisted. The remaining two reports did not receive a FACS response as they were concerning individuals who are now aged 18.

**Q2: In terms of dealing with and working with communities, does that involve instances and occasions where you are working, talking and discussing matters with religious leaders?**

When undertaking risk assessments and providing case work support, Family and Community Services (FACS) works with the most appropriate services and stakeholders relating to the individual case. This may include religious leaders where that's appropriate. The Multicultural Services Unit within FACS has established networks and built links with community representatives and other stakeholders regarding UFM.

**Q3: Is there a starting point when the department started to collect it (data on UFM reports)?**

The Department of Family and Community Services commenced collecting data on reports to the Child Protection Helpline regarding UFM in July 2014.

**Q 4: What is the New South Wales Government doing to track those kids that jump out of their foster care or the care of the government and end up on street? How does the Government take account of where those kids are and what they are up to?**

FACS is unsure if this question relates to children and young people in OOHC who abscond from placements or if this question relates to young people leaving care after turning age 18. We have provided a response to both scenarios.

**Children and young people who abscond from OOHC placements:**

The NSW Child Safe Standards for Permanent Care 2015 are used by the NSW Children's Guardian for the accreditation of agencies that provide statutory out-of-home care services (OOHC) and/or adoption services in NSW. The standards are strength-based and encourage agencies to continuously strive for best-practice to ensure that children in OOHC are safe.

FACS has in place casework practice guidelines for responding to missing children or young people. If there are serious safety concerns for a missing child or young person or if they are in the care of the Minister, the advised practice is to immediately report this to the NSW Police.

**Young people leaving OOHC:**

Once a young person leaves OOHC at age 18, both FACS and non-government agencies are required to offer regular follow up support to care leavers. Eligible care leavers receive individualised planning from 15 years of age to prepare them for independence and ensure their needs are met in early adulthood. Over three years, the young person is helped to identify and achieve goals such as, obtaining a driver's licence, securing employment and enrolling in education or training.

As the young person nears 18, plans are consolidated in regard to basic needs such as health, housing, employment and education or training. Where possible, individuals or agencies are identified that will provide support or services to the young person after they have left care, and agreement for or service access is confirmed.

Young people who have left care can obtain assistance through a number of pathways including FACS, their OOHC agency, a specialist aftercare service or the FACS managed Care Leavers Line for information or assistance at any time they need it. Young people leaving care are also able to be linked into or helped to access universal services some of which may be specific to or prioritise care leavers. Examples include Centrelink benefits, the Commonwealth Transition to Independent Living Allowance, the public health system and accommodation such as social housing and private rental assistance targeting young people.

FACS will provide direct financial assistance for the completion of Year 12 studies if it is determined that universal services will not sufficiently meet a young person's needs or are not available in a timely manner.

Direct financial assistance can be in the form of a short term fortnightly allowance to help with accommodation or one-off payments for establishment costs or other expenses. This assistance is approved as part of the leaving care plan which can be amended after the young person leaves care, based on their individual needs.

People who have left care may receive assistance from FACS funded specialist aftercare services. OOHC agencies may refer care leavers to these

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services which are primarily for those requiring a degree of ongoing case coordination. Care leavers may also self refer. Aftercare services may provide support or arrange support through linking to mainstream services or utilising brokerage funds, or approach FACS for amendment to the leaving care plan to add new forms of assistance.

# **INQUIRY INTO HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN NSW Supplementary Question**

General Purpose Standing Committee

NSW Department of Family and Community Services

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**Answer due by: 26 June 2017**

## 1. Who are you working with to identify and prevent forced child marriages?

The work to reduce Underage Forced Marriage (UFM) requires collaboration between federal and state governments, non government organisations and community representatives. As a result, the NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) is working with a range of agencies to support children and young people at risk of or in a forced marriage.

### ***Joint State and Commonwealth Working Group (Working Group)***

This Working Group was established by Legal Aid NSW in September 2016 to:

- Develop protocols to prevent forced marriage (both underage and of age)
- Identify service gaps and initiate projects to support people impacted by underage forced marriage
- Work on the development of a consistent definition (so that both planned and actual UFM are included)
- Foster communication and information sharing.

The members are the Australian Federal Police (AFP), Legal Aid NSW (chair), FACS, Department of Education, the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department, NSW Police and Multicultural NSW.

The Working Group meets bimonthly and has developed a referral pathway to respond to reports of UFM made. The pathway means that there will be a consistent and prompt response to reports of UFM. This is important particularly if a child or young person is at risk of being taken overseas for a forced marriage. This pathway means that the AFP will be quickly notified. The AFP can then take action to stop the child or young person travelling, and refer them to the Australian Red Cross Support for Trafficked People Program.

### ***Master classes***

FACS has run five master classes for its frontline staff. One of these included staff in non government organisations. These classes aim to improve the understanding of front line staff of the cultural, social and economic factors that lead to UFM and the ways to support a child or young person at risk of or in a forced marriage.

These classes are co presented by FACS, Legal Aid NSW, Anti Slavery NSW, the AFP, and the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights. This joint approach to running the classes means that FACS staff gain a good understanding of the role played by these organisations which helps improve collaboration and referral. The inclusion of staff from non government organisations in these classes also helps to build local links.

***Forced Marriage Network***

This network is run by Anti Slavery NSW. Its focus is operational to provide better support to children and young people at risk of or in a forced marriage. Members include government and non government agencies. FACS frontline staff attend the network meetings, and participation assists to build links between government and non government agencies.

***Work with the AFP and Department of Education***

FACS front line staff work closely with the AFP and the Department of Education when dealing with reports of UFM. This collaboration involves joint interviews of the child or young person where required.