

INQUIRY INTO CHILD PROTECTION

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Systems Abuse

I would like to make a submission to the Commission in relation to the Systems Abuse of children in the Out of Home Care sector due to the "Move them on" attitude of Case workers within the Department of Family and Community Services and NGO's providing Out of Home Care Services. I have been a foster carer and worked in Out of Home care services for the last 14 years and hear constantly about children that have been moved on by the Department or Agencies when carers seek help for challenging behaviours. The attitude displayed by many Case workers is the carer must be doing something to trigger the behaviour so it is in the best interests of the child to move on to a new carer. However research has long found that the best outcomes for children in Out of Home Care (OOHC) lies in placement stability, which is why new Legislation has come out placing adoption and guardianship ahead of foster care in the placement hierarchy.

Carers are required to do training in Trauma informed care as it is recognised that a lot of the challenging behaviours witnessed in children in OOHC are a result of the trauma they have experienced in the first year - 3 years of life. Abuse, neglect and exposure to Domestic Violence cause their brains to hard wire differently to children in stable, nurturing households so they are hyper alert to danger and stress and they often respond by lashing out or running due to their heightened fight or flight responses. Often these children are unaware of their own triggers as a lot of the abuse/neglect occurred before they could speak. It is a well known fact that the behaviours surrounding this early exposure to trauma can last for years despite a loving and nurturing care environment. Carers need an increased level of support, however when they reach out and ask for help they are frequently being blamed for the behaviour and the children are either moved on by Community services or the agencies, or the carers are pressured into relinquishing care. The children are further rejected and damaged by the Department or Agency's refusal to allow the carer ongoing contact with the children.

Case Study:

I know you are not taking individual cases however this is just one example of the type of thing that is happening state wide.

I had a child placed with me in December 2010, he was 12 days shy of his first birthday. He had been exposed to severe domestic violence and he had suffered extreme neglect. When he came to me he could not sit up, crawl, hold a bottle or eat solid food, he had very low muscle tone and he screamed around 16 hours a day and could not be consoled in the usual ways. After a month of extensive work with him he was able to sit, crawl, hold a bottle and eat all manner of food, however he still screamed constantly. The screaming never let up, it reduced to about 8 hours a day and as he grew the screaming changed to violent tantrums where he would hurt other people and himself. Anything would trigger a tantrum, we rarely knew what caused them and they lasted for ages. This behaviour continued, I asked for support several times however it was never forthcoming. I did what I could, we did early intervention and I muddled on. His skills continued to improve however his behaviour never did. It would ebb and flow, he would escalate for a while then settle back down however he threw at least two tantrums a day every day we had him. He was violent toward other children, sometimes causing real damage, he would throw things at them and hit them with whatever he had at the time, he also bit, punched, kicked and scratched.. His behaviour was evident at his early intervention preschool and daycare as well. Several times a year I would email asking for support

with his behaviour, the emails were generally ignored. In August of 2015 I went to New Zealand to visit an elderly relative, on my return I started a new job with longer hours. Almost immediately the child's behaviour deteriorated to the point where he was throwing violent tantrums that lasted for hours and he was destroying property and hurting people. he was excluded from daycare after assaulting the daycarer, then excluded from preschool. It had reached crisis level and I was begging for help from community services and their psychologist. I tried to engage a Psych myself and Community services forbid it, I tried to get into the paediatrician and Community services said I wasn't allowed to. They began to suggest that I was the cause of his behaviour as he had behaved in respite and they believed him to be better off in another placement. This is a child who had been in my car since a baby, the only placement he had ever had, I was willing to keep him until adulthood, even looking into guardianship. Things got to crisis level and I was basically forced into relinquishing care. The child has since had another placement break down due to the exact behaviours I had experienced, that carer lasted 6 months.

If this were an isolated case I would not be doing this submission, however this is a story that is being repeated time and time again in the Out of Home Care sector with children bouncing from placement to placement due to case workers not only not supporting carers but blaming them for behaviour and moving children on.

I apologise this is not as prepared as I would have liked I have not had the time to do so, however thought it important that the area of systems abuse is looked into as it is affecting many children.

Recommendations:

That Case workers in both Department of Family and Community Services and the NGO sector be educated thoroughly in trauma informed practice and that supporting carers with children with challenging behaviour become a priority to help maintain placements for the best outcomes for children and young people in out of home care.

It can be highly challenging to care for these children with support but without it and even having case work staff work against carers makes a very difficult job way harder than it has to be.

Thanks for reading.