Carer Council Communique

November 2024

Update

The Carer Council held its fourth, and final, meeting of its inaugural year on 4 November 2024 at CF&KC-SA's new office in Dulwich. Ten Members attended in-person, with two apologies.

Meeting topics

On the agenda for discussion was:

- Workforce consistency and communication with carers
- Mental health and peer support for carers

Attendance

Carer Council Members: Alexandra Ingleton, Dana Wright, Ellese Nelson, Gai McMichael, Gail Ward, Kailah Hurditch, Kate Thomas, Lorraine Joy (Chair), Peter Kennedy, and Suzanne Scanlon.

Support: Dana Shen (Facilitator), Lauren Gibbs (Carer Council Project Lead, CF&KC-SA), Fiona Endacott (CEO, CF&KC-SA)

Apologies: Emily Ware, Jakob Schmaal

Guest speakers:

- Hon. Katrine Hildyard, Minister for Child Protection for a reflective opening speech and her vision for the Carer Council for 2025 (in person)
- Leanne Galpin, Carer Consultant Project Office, Office of the Chief Psychiatrist on existing mental health supports for carers in SA (in person)
- Sharee Borlace, Senior Advocate at CF&KC-SA on workforce consistency and trends within CF&KC-SA's advocacy service (presented to the Council on 22 October 2024)
- Professor Damien Riggs on meeting the mental health needs of foster carers in South Australia (presented to the Council on 22 October 2024)

Themes arising from the meeting

Overarching themes

- The need for better implementation of the *Statement of Commitment to foster and kinship carers* (*Statement of Commitment*).
- The particular need to support kinship carers.

- A desire to have ongoing conversations on the Council's topics, with the view that further dialogue would strengthen the Council's recommendations.
- The need to support carers when they are actively asking for help and showing signs of struggle.
- Elements of fairness and equity to be reflected in Departmental action and responses, without diminishing the needs of other children, young people and their carers.

Workforce consistency and communication

Workforce consistency and communication with carers encompasses a wide range of issues experienced by carers. For example, consistent application of policy in response to carers requests, access to information, responsiveness, respectful communication, and adequate complaints channels are some areas of concern to carers that fall within the remit of this topic.

This topic has presented at each Carer Council meeting and is considered by the Carer Council a crucial element of retention of carers, and attraction of new carers as a flow on effect.

The Council chose to focus on:

- Reimbursements and funding requests
- *Carer Reference One: Carer Support Payments - Who Pays for What?* (*Carer Reference One*)
- Property damage
- Information sharing
- Complaints processes

Themes within the Council's discussion on these topics included:

- Improving workforce consistency and communication with carers as crucial to retaining carers.
- Out-of-pocket expenses, the cost of caring, and ways to streamline cover for additional expenses.
- Clearer review rights where carers are aggrieved.
- A need to update *Carer Reference One* in consultation with carers.
- Issues relating to insurances and how property damage plays into this for carers.
- Transparency in policy. There is a view that the lack of transparency in policy and procedure is intentional to actively deter carers from self-advocating.
- Information sharing and tapping into supports that may already be around.
- Better promotion of useful resources.
- Sharing resources with new carers.
- The ongoing role of information sharing throughout the caring journey.
- Clear and transparent communication with carers.

- Clear policy positions, with room for individual circumstances and exceptions to be considered.

Mental health and peer support

The Council has heard from the community and can acknowledge from their own experiences that mental health support for carers is crucial in retention efforts. Many carers have described feeling isolated and misunderstood by their family and non-carer peer group, meaning peer support from other carers is also an important aspect in building support-networks for carers.

Themes within the Council's discussion on these topics included:

- Prioritisation of mental health for carers.
- Better induction for carers regarding the role of caring and what to expect.
- Increasing available mental health supports through various modes/platforms.
- Ensuring programs and services do not exclude certain carers e.g. kinship or regional.
- Breaking down the 'silos' that kinship, foster, regional and metro-based carers are often put into by their service providers for services and events.
- Building genuine support systems for carers into Departmental structures for a sustainable future.
- Destigmatising caring for mental health to encourage supports for carers who are worried that accessing support will impact the stability of their placements.
- The unique mental health support needs of carers.
- The need for preventative mental health support for carers, as well as support in crisis that is provided by services that understand child protection issues.
- Generic mental health services being unsuitable for many carers.

Narrative work

The Carer Council discussed the culture of the child protection and family support system that views the proactive (and reactive) need for mental health support as a risk or problem, views carers as a problem in advocating for their children and young people, and penalises carers for seeking support.

The Carer Council discussed the need to work on a culture shift within the system to improve perceptions in these areas in terms of:

- Ensuring carers can access mental health supports to sustain them in their role, without fear or penalty.
- Ensuring the *Statement of Commitment* is embedded in practice.
- Being open to complaints and feedback and actively encouraging this to improve the system and service to the public.

Meeting outcomes

The Council developed 31 recommendations to the Minister, including:

- 20 recommendations on workforce consistency and communication with carers, including:
  - 3 on reimbursements and funding requests
  - 5 on *Carer Reference One*
  - 2 on property damage
  - 8 on information sharing
  - 2 on complaints processes
- Eight recommendations on mental health and peer support, including:
  - 4 on mental health
  - 4 on peer support
- Three recommendations on narrative work, which includes:
  - 1 on complaints narrative
  - 1 on the *Statement of Commitment* narrative
  - 1 on mental health narrative

Next meeting

The next meeting of the Carer Council will be held on 10 February 2025.

Contact

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