

**Family and placement services
Sector development plan**

Published by the Victorian Government Department of Human Services
Melbourne, Victoria

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Authorised by the State Government of Victoria, 50 Lonsdale, Melbourne.
Printed by Documents on Call, 2B Parker Street, Footscray.

Hon. Sherryl Garbutt
Minister for Children,
Minister for Community Services
Parliament House
MELBOURNE

30 June 2006

Dear Minister

In March 2004, in response to a recommendation contained in *Pathways to partnership – the final report of the out-of-home care partnership case study review* (June 2003), you announced the development of a family and placement services sector development plan (the ‘plan’). A steering committee was established and asked to identify the current and future challenges facing the sector; identify the actions required to meet these challenges; and develop realistic and achievable processes for meeting these challenges.

As co-chairs of the steering committee we are pleased to present you with this report, which contains the first iteration of the plan. This report articulates a vision for the family and placement services sector and identifies both our objectives and the key characteristics that need to be developed in our sector if we are to fulfil this vision. With this aspirational focus, the plan then outlines a range of actions we are committed to taking over the next two years in order to build these characteristics.

Representatives from community service organisations (CSOs); peak bodies; community health; local government; and the Office for Children of the Department of Human Services have worked together to develop the plan. A great deal of background work has been undertaken which has provided the information and data we needed to complete this task. Some of this work – particularly through the scenario planning and workforce working groups – has provided us with data this sector has not previously possessed. We believe that this plan has been developed using the best available data and research, coupled with the practice wisdom and experience of the people who work in the sector. Accordingly, it provides us with a way forward that is considered, evidence based and owned by our sector.

Imagining the future is difficult. Regardless of how well we believe this version of the plan captures the current issues, it is inevitable that over time demands and contexts will change and what seems of the utmost importance today, may not seem so in 12 or 24 months. Therefore, one important aspect of this report is the identified need to continually monitor the plan and formally review it on a biannual basis.

This plan will shape the delivery of family and placement services into the future. We hope that it will assist us to develop a service system capable of delivering services that improve the outcomes for Victoria’s vulnerable children, young people and families. We recommend the report to you.

Lisa Neville MLA
Member for Bellarine

Paul Linossier
CEO, MacKillop Family Services

Minister's response

The development of the *Family and placement services sector development plan* has taken place during an unprecedented period of change for Victoria's child and family support system. The new *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act (2005)* and the *Children, Youth and Families Act (2005)* and the accompanying white paper, *Protecting children...the next steps*, have heralded a period of change in the delivery of services to all vulnerable children, young people and their families in Victoria.

Providing children and young people with the best possible start in life, and their families and communities with the help they need to achieve this, is central to the Victorian Government's vision for a fair and prosperous Victoria. While this vision applies to all children and young people, the sector development plan is concerned with one particular group – the vulnerable children, young people and families who access family and placement services.

Fulfilment of this vision is dependent upon a robust and effective family and placement services sector, working in partnership with government. It is in recognition of this fact that the plan has been developed in partnership between government and the family and placement services sector.

Victoria is in the fortunate position of having a long history of family and placement services being delivered by organisations with a strong connection to the community and an equally strong commitment to working with our community's most vulnerable citizens. It is essential that we recognise the opportunities this history brings and ensure that these organisations and government work together to better harness the potential necessary to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

The plan is an important early step in the change process we have underway in Victoria. It identifies the vision and objectives of this sector, the characteristics of a sector capable of meeting these objectives and a number of actions intended to start to strengthen these characteristics. Importantly, it also puts in place an agreed process for the ongoing monitoring and revision of the plan, which provides a sound basis for a longer-term strategic approach to planning to meet the needs of vulnerable children, youth and families and of the organisations committed to support and engage this important part of our community.

I look forward to working with you to achieve the goals the plan sets out.

Hon Sherryl Garbutt MP

Minister for Children

Minister for Community Services

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Executive summary

The family and placement services sector ('the sector') delivers child-focused services to vulnerable children, young people and their families. Specifically, the sector incorporates:

- family services¹
- out-of-home care²
- placement support services.³

In 2006–07, funding provided by the Department of Human Services for the delivery of family and placement services will total approximately \$241 million. Of this, \$34 million is provided for caregiver reimbursements and \$5 million for direct client expense payments to carers. The balance, with the exception of some department-delivered services (permanent care, secure welfare services and a small number of residential services), is provided directly to service providers. The funding levels are:

Family services:	\$56.8 million (23.6 per cent of total)
Out-of-home care:	\$132 million (54.8 per cent)
Placement support:	\$52 million (21.6 per cent)

This paper, which contains the first iteration of the *Family and placement services sector development plan* (the 'plan'), is one of seven papers produced as part of the overall work of the plan. The others are:

- *Victorian families, children and their carers* (August 2005 – see Attachment 1 for a summary of some of the paper's main findings)
- *Governance, research, outcomes and infrastructure* (October 2005)
- *Findings of the survey of paid employees* (August 2006, incorporating comment on issues in kinship care and volunteer issues – see Attachment 2 for a summary of some of the paper's main findings)
- *Findings of the survey of foster carers* (August 2006)
- *A new approach to funding for home-based care* (August 2006)
- *The report of the audit of Aboriginal children and young people in care – the Connecting to Communities project* (August 2006).

These papers provide valuable background to the development of the plan. Full texts of the papers are available at www.dhs.vic.gov.au/sectordevelopment.

¹ Identified as activities 31230 (Family Services) and 31236 (Family Support Innovations Projects) in the Office for Children Policy and Funding Plan.

² General, intensive and complex home-based care; adolescent community placement; permanent care; kinship care; lead tenant; and residential care.

³ Such as adolescent support services, intensive case management services, residential care case management, *Take Two*.

Some of the information gathered in compiling these papers had not been previously collected, demonstrating a prior lack of data for the sector. The collection of this information is one of the benefits of developing this plan.

As noted above, this document is only the first iteration of the plan. The sector development plan is not a ‘final product’ or static document; it is an ‘agreed process’ of planning, monitoring, review and re-planning. It is envisaged that every two years a revised version of the plan will be released. These biannual reviews will be informed by the ongoing monitoring processes discussed in section 3 of this document.

It is also important to note that this plan and the work that arises from it does not represent **every** piece of work that is either already planned or will be planned in the future within the family and placement services sector. Victoria is in a significant period of reform. The implementation of the new *Children, Youth and Families Act (2005)* will bring with it a range of actions not addressed in this plan, as will the fact that family and placement services operate within a dynamic environment that will require government, the department and community service organisations to adapt and respond to new issues as they arise.

Whole of sector

A major theme of the plan is the ‘whole of sector’ approach to planning. This represents a significant shift for the sector; however, it is a shift that many regions have begun and a direction that has been long advocated for, as evident in the document *Pathways to partnership: the final report of the out-of-home care partnership case study review*.⁴ Governance structures at the statewide, regional and sub-regional levels must be built to enable planning and performance monitoring at the systems level. The plan details how this can be achieved. Implicit in the tasks of planning and monitoring is a focus on the needs of individual children, young people and families and a commitment to improve outcomes for those who access the services.

It is also important to note that the new *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act (2005)* contains a range of principles that apply to all services funded by the Office for Children that work with children, young people and families. These principles are intended to guide the development and provision of services to children and families. They support the notion of an integrated system of services that shares a common vision and they provide impetus to continue to focus efforts on more coordinated and joined up ways of working together at the local level.

⁴ *Pathways to partnership: the final report of the out-of-home care partnership case study review*, Department of Human Services, June 2003

Vision

The plan contains three visions to drive the sector. The first is Victoria's vision for all children, which has been developed as part of the work for the statewide plan for children and its associated outcomes framework:

Every child thrives, learns and grows, is valued and respected (to become an effective adult)

While this vision applies to all children, it is important to acknowledge that the family and placement services sector exists first and foremost to provide services to Victoria's vulnerable children, young people and families. Therefore, this overarching vision needs to be supplemented by a more specific vision which speaks about those who rely on our services:

To give families and communities the help they need to provide Victoria's vulnerable children and young people with the best possible start in life.

Following on from this child-focused vision, it is also important to consider the vision for the broader service system, that is, the characteristics the service system must have if it is to achieve the child-centred vision described above. This vision is articulated in the following way:

Positive outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and families in Victoria will be achieved through a collaborative service system of skilled and sustainable community service organisations working in a robust partnership with other services, government and the wider community.

While the plan and this paper are concerned primarily with the organisations that deliver family and placement services, the 'collaborative service system' will also rely on collaboration from a wider range of areas, including the Department of Human Services Child Protection program and the wide range of government funded and delivered services that impact on the lives of vulnerable clients. The positive outcomes cannot be achieved by family and placement service providers alone; they can only be achieved with the support of the wider social service system in Victoria.

Consultation

As part of the background work to developing the plan, the following consultations were held:

- In October 2005, four consultations were held with leaders of the family and placement services sector. More than 100 senior staff representing 40 organisations attended these consultations.
- The CREATE Foundation conducted two focus group consultations with children and young people with a care experience. Young people from all regions were invited to participate in the consultations. Nine young people from the Eastern, Southern and Barwon-South Western regions were able to participate. A summary of the key themes and recommendations arising from this consultation is provided as Attachment 3.⁵
- A consultation with representatives of Aboriginal service providers was held in February 2006.
- In February 2006, a consultation on the draft of the plan was held with 40 senior representatives of the family and placement services sector from 20 organisations.
- Opportunities were provided for written and verbal feedback on various papers produced during the life of the plan.

The October consultations asked participants to consider the challenges facing the sector today and also how the sector would know – in ten years' time – whether or not this plan had been successful. What would the characteristics of a strong and effective family and placement services sector be? In other words, what will we need to do to meet our vision? The February consultations confirmed and clarified the first iteration of these challenges and characteristics. These are detailed below.

Key characteristics

Listening to children, young people, families and communities – the system must be shaped so that services always seek and are guided by the different stakeholders. In particular, services need to hear the voices of children and young people in care⁶.

⁵ The key themes and recommendations arising from the CREATE consultation are instructive, especially with regard to the issues identified around needing to focus on hearing the voice of children and young people in care. The outcomes of the consultation will inform work underway in this area.

⁶ As noted above, Attachment 3 provides a summary of consultations undertaken by CREATE with children and young people with a care experience to inform this plan. The attachment is very informative on this issue.

Outcomes driven – service effectiveness must be judged on the outcomes achieved, and these must be evaluated and systematically monitored and used to highlight strengths and deficits to drive further practice improvements.

Increasing our focus on earlier⁷ intervention – vulnerable families must receive effective help earlier to provide care for their children. As a result, there will be fewer notifications, fewer re-notifications, and fewer children will need to enter deeper into the child protection system (including out-of-home care).

When children must become involved with the out-of-home care system, their needs must be quickly assessed and responded to in order to maximise the likelihood of achieving stability; preferably back with family or, in some instances, in alternative long-term care.

Stronger service models – flexibility, innovation and evidence must inform and enable the introduction of more effective service models across the continuum of service from family support to out-of-home care.

More research and improved evidence base – policy and practice must be driven by a greatly enhanced focus on research, innovation and evidence of what works. Research should also impact on broader government understanding of the sector (particularly relevant to Treasury).

A stable and effective paid workforce – paid staff must have manageable workloads; be better trained, supported and paid; have more opportunities for advancement and clearer career paths. This will contribute to better outcomes for children, young people and families.

A better supported and growing volunteer workforce – volunteers must be better supported; better trained and respected; and, in the case of home-based care, more fairly reimbursed and recognised as genuine members of each child's care team. This should, at least partially, address attrition rates amongst the existing carer population and strengthen and normalise our family support response.

⁷ Throughout this document the terms 'earlier intervention' or 'intervening earlier' are used. These terms are used to apply to intervention that occurs as soon as a child, young person or family's vulnerability has been identified. By contrast, the term 'early intervention' refers to intervention at a stage before vulnerability has been identified and therefore applies to more universal services which are not a focus of the plan.

Strong, viable Aboriginal organisations – existing Aboriginal service providers must be strengthened to provide more and better services to their community. This will contribute to having fewer Indigenous children in care and more Indigenous children who are in care will be cared for within community.

Well supported kinship carers – the predicted enormous growth in kinship care and fall in foster carer availability makes the current absence a systematic approach to kinship carer support untenable. Kinship carers must be better supported by well developed and effective service models.

A supportive community – we must promote a better understanding of the value and complexity of the work of the sector within the broader community. We must also ensure that staff of the sector fully appreciate and value the importance of the work that they do.

Fair funding – service providers must receive funding that truly reflects the cost of service provision and enables high quality services to be provided.

Working together within government – a real whole-of-government approach will exist, with all areas and levels of government working together to improve the response to the myriad needs of vulnerable families, children and young people.

True partnership – funded community organisations and the department will work together to achieve shared objectives. The differences between the two will be acknowledged and respected. Service providers will have an active voice in developing and implementing policy.

Greater focus on planning ahead – a greater focus on long-term planning will enable the sector to become proactive, rather than reactive.

These characteristics provide the starting point for discussion of the plan, detailed in Section 4. They have also informed the articulation of the following eight key challenges.

Key challenges

The plan must address the following key challenges:

1. Inadequately defined approach to partnership between government, service providers and service users which includes an inadequate definition of each party's roles and responsibilities.
2. Inadequate service coordination and leadership at the regional and statewide level.
3. A reactive service system, driven by system, organisational and external pressures rather than by a focus on achieving improved outcomes for children, young people and families and acting in a way that is informed by research and best practice.
4. Service models that have not kept pace with the changing nature and rising complexity of the children, young people and families the services are for, and which need to ensure a stronger focus on earlier intervention.
5. A declining volunteer workforce within out-of-home care and a need to better harness and support the potential volunteer resource that exists in other parts of the service system.
6. Aboriginal children, young people and families under-represented in family support services and over-represented in placement services. Many Aboriginal children and young people are losing contact with their culture and communities. Our services must be more responsive and culturally aware.
7. Little understanding of the nature and value of the work of this sector within the broader community and an undervaluing of our work within the sector.
8. Failure to regularly update and revise funding models to reflect increasing complexity.

Each of these challenges fall into one of two categories:

1. Those related to the issue of governance: '... the structure of formal and informal relations to manage affairs through collaborative approaches between government agencies and the non-government sector'⁸.
2. Those related to service effectiveness and sustainability.

It is these challenges that the actions detailed in the first iteration of the plan seek to address. A summary of the actions is provided below:

⁸ *Success Works (2002), Working together – integrated governance, March p. i*

Table E1 Summary of actions

Action	Priority ⁹	Lead Responsibility
STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE		
Strengthening advisory structures and planning		
Establish the advisory structure as detailed in this paper	A	Office for Children
Child Protection and Family Services Advisory Group to clearly articulate agreed principles for inclusion of the sector in planning and development of policy initiatives – to be built on the existing Partnership Agreement between the Department of Human Services and funded health, housing and community sector organisations and the collaboration and consultation principles for the department and the health, housing and community sector	A	CP&FSAG
Establish an Office for Children Aboriginal Advisory Committee	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Facilitate planning process between multi-region community service organisations to achieve more service-user friendly and less fragmented agency deployment	A	Multi-region CSOs
Develop a ‘leadership bank’ approach for identified sector leaders aimed at developing leadership skills	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Draft statement of roles and responsibilities for effecting positive change within the sector between the department, peak bodies, regions and community service organisations	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Strengthening the focus on outcomes		
Develop measures of service system effectiveness and monitor on an ongoing basis	A	MAC
Establish an outcomes framework for Victoria’s children and commence monitoring via the Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System	A	Office for Children (Statewide Outcomes Branch)
Establish priority populations outcomes framework (Aboriginal children and children in out-of-home care)	B	Office for Children (Statewide Outcomes Branch)
STRENGTHENING SERVICE EFFECTIVENESS AND SUSTAINABILITY		
Strengthening the voice of children, young people and families		
Develop, implement and monitor Charter for Children in Care	A	Child Safety Commissioner and Office for Children (CP&FS)
Develop a clear articulation of practice expectations around hearing the voice of children and young people in care, together with materials/publications to support this work	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)

⁹ Priority A - action implemented within 12 months. Priority B - developmental work commenced within 12 months and implemented within two years.

Action	Priority	Lead Responsibility
Strengthening Aboriginal service responsiveness		
Undertake an Aboriginal service capacity building strategy	A	Office for Children
Develop an Office for Children Plan for Aboriginal Children	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Implement the whole-of-family model of family support within Aboriginal communities	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Consider the establishment of an Aboriginal peak or lead organisation to lead the establishment of a partnership between Aboriginal organisations, non-Aboriginal organisations and the Department of Human Services and support its continuation in consultation with community	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Develop an Aboriginal staff development strategy	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Pilot and evaluate a model of kinship care service delivery within an Aboriginal organisation	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Develop an Aboriginal foster care recruitment strategy	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Further expand Aboriginal Family Decision Making model as funding allows	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Strengthening foster care		
Establish foster carer help line	A	Foster Care Association of Victoria
Train all relevant CSO staff in the delivery of the common competency-based statewide foster carer assessment and training package	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Develop enhanced common training material for foster carers for use by all service providers	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Through ongoing implementation of the Looking After Children framework, re-emphasise the need to ensure all carers are involved in all processes as genuine members of the child's care team	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Implement a new funding model for home-based care	A	Office for Children (CP&FS and Program and Sector Support)
Develop a statewide foster carer recruitment strategy	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Pilot a regional approach to foster care recruitment, assessment and training	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)

Action	Priority	Lead Responsibility
Strengthening the evidence base		
Establish the Felton Chair in Child and Family Welfare	A	Centre for Excellence
Fund research assistant position to support the Chair in Child and Family Welfare	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Establish process for the identification and dissemination of innovative practice within the sector	B	Centre for Excellence
Strengthening service model effectiveness and quality		
Review the family services strategic framework	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Continue planning and rollout of community-based intake across the state	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Pilot and evaluate two models of kinship care service delivery – supported by well articulated guidelines and standards as necessary	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Implement a model of therapeutic foster care	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Strengthen the clinical capacity and understanding across the Family and Placement Services Sector	B	CP&FSAG, COLG
Develop models of care to accommodate children and young people subject to a Therapeutic Treatment (Placement) Order as defined in the <i>Children, Youth and Families Act (2005)</i> sections 252–258	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Develop an early assessment tool for use with all children and young people entering out-of-home care to identify needs and services required	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Establish process for agency registration which promotes focus on service quality	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Provide recurrent funding to the Centre for Excellence to play a lead role in supporting service providers to meet their service requirements and embed a focus on quality improvement	A	Centre for Excellence
Develop a strategic plan to improve outcomes for children and young people in residential care	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Establish the ‘Hurstbridge Farm’ therapeutic care model (Eastern and North and West regions)	A	Office for Children
Review the approach to permanent care to ensure consistency with the focus on stability within the <i>Children, Youth and Families Act (2005)</i>	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)

Action	Priority	Lead Responsibility
Strengthen the effectiveness of Secure Welfare Services, in particular assist the transition to community placement	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Complete rollout of Family Support Innovations programs across the state	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Develop a model of leaving care support	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Strengthening service sustainability		
Develop and agree on funding principles for all family and placement services	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Strengthening workforce		
Develop a five-year workforce planning and training strategy	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Develop volunteer (non-foster care) workforce strategy as part of the workforce planning work	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Strengthening the profile		
Develop a strategy for effective communication of the work of the sector	A	MAC

Further details about these actions is contained in Section 4, together with a more detailed discussion of the actions that relate to improving service response to Aboriginal children, young people and families.

These actions will be implemented and monitored over the next two years and their progress will inform the second iteration of the plan.

Introduction

Victoria's child and family support system is in the midst of significant reform, most fully articulated in the policy white paper *Protecting children...the next steps*. The white paper focuses on the need to ensure that everything we do in this sector is targeted at improving outcomes for children, young people and families, and outlines a number of strategies and actions intended to achieve this. There are 14 strategies set out in the white paper. This plan responds to Strategy 13:

Integrating planning and sector development – Building a flexible, skilled workforce, and timely and effective services, necessary infrastructure and productive and sustainable organisations.

The family and placement services sector development plan (the plan) is the first step towards bringing this strategy to life. This paper is divided into four main sections:

- Section 1: **Background** – defines the family and placement services sector, discusses the background to the plan and places the plan within the current context.
- Section 2: **Our vision and aspirations** – discusses a vision for the sector, and the characteristics that need to be developed in the sector if this vision is to be fulfilled.
- Section 3: **Monitoring and reviewing the plan** – describes the processes that will be established to monitor performance against the plan and to review and adapt the plan in future.
- Section 4: **Moving forward** – contains the first version of the plan itself.

As noted in the Foreword, this is the first of five iterations of the plan. It is useful to think of the plan not so much in terms of 'product' as in terms of 'process'. The plan is not a static, point in time document. Rather, through the establishment of the plan we are committing to a dynamic process of planning, monitoring, review and re-planning. It is envisaged that every two years a revised version of the plan will be released. These biannual reviews will be informed by the ongoing monitoring processes established (as discussed in section 3). Figure 1 illustrates this iterative process.

It is also important to note that this plan and the work that arises from it does not represent every piece of work that is either already planned or will be planned in the future within the family and placement services sector. Victoria is in the middle of a

significant and dynamic period of reform. The implementation of the new *Children, Youth and Families Act (2005)* and the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act (2005)* will bring with it a range of actions that are not addressed in this plan.

This paper is one of seven papers produced as part of the work of the plan.¹⁰
The others are:

- *Victorian families, children and their carers* (August 2005 – see Attachment 1 for a summary of some of the paper’s main findings)
- *Governance, research, outcomes and infrastructure* (October 2005)
- *Findings of the survey of paid employees* (August 2006 – incorporating comment on kinship care and volunteer issues; see Attachment 2 for a summary of some of the paper’s main findings)
- *Findings of the survey of foster carers* (August 2006)
- *A new approach to funding for home-based care* (August 2006)
- *The report of the audit of Aboriginal children and young people in care – the Connecting to Communities project* (August 2006).

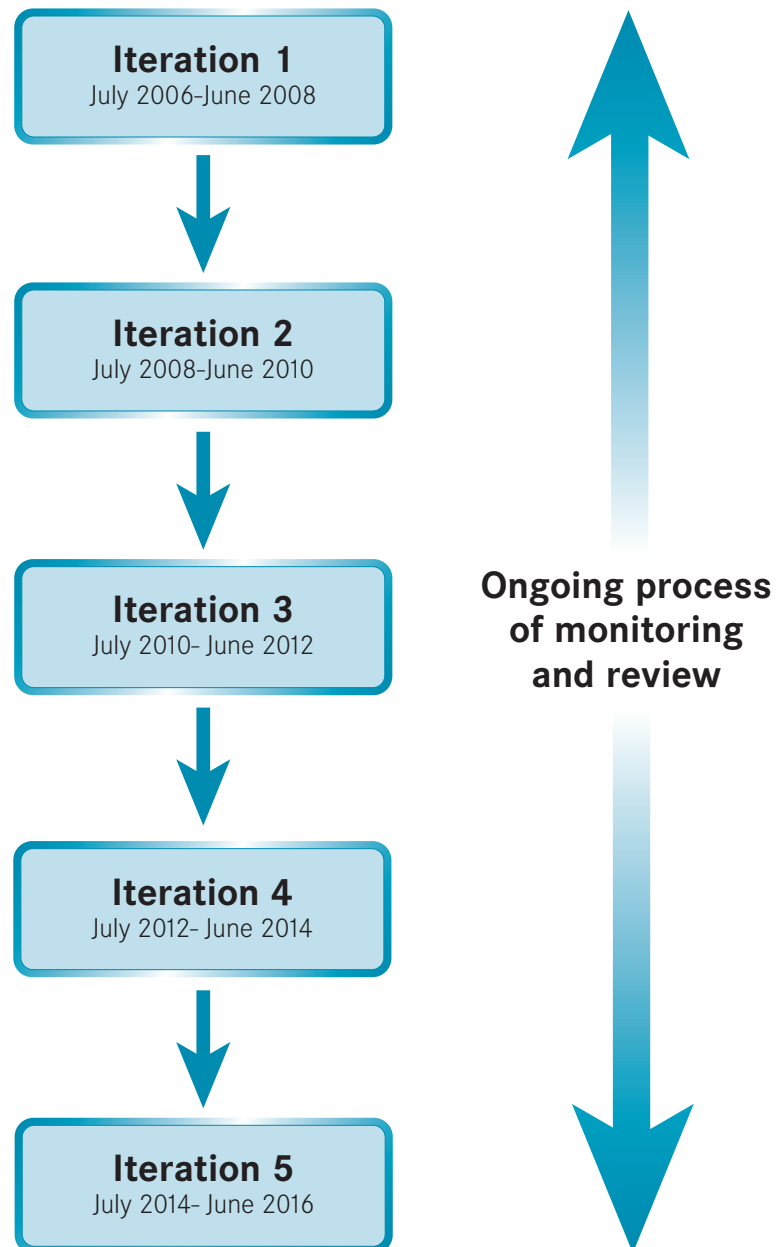
In several areas, the information gathered in compiling these papers had not been previously collected, demonstrating a lack of data of the sector. The collection of this information is, in itself, one of the benefits of developing this plan.

How to read this document

This is a long and detailed document. While a full reading is recommended to gain a total picture of the context and rationale behind the plan, it is acknowledged that for some people it may be possible to gain an adequate understanding of the plan through a more selective approach. The Executive Summary provides an overview while Section 4 contains the actual plan.

¹⁰ A copy of all available papers can be found on the Sector Development Plan website at: www.dhs.vic.gov.au/sectordevelopment

Figure 1: Family and placement services sector development plan – planning cycle



Section 1 Background and context

The family and placement services sector

The family and placement services sector (the ‘sector’) delivers child-focused services to vulnerable children, young people and their families. Specifically, the sector incorporates:

- family services¹¹
- out-of-home care¹²
- placement support services.¹³

Out-of-home care, placement support and the majority of family services are provided by a number of community service organisations (CSOs), with some family services provided by local government and community health organisations. In addition, the Department of Human Services delivers some permanent care services, a small number of residential care services in the North and West Region and the statewide Secure Welfare Service. The department also has primary responsibility for delivery of the state’s Kinship Care program, although there are several small Kinship Care programs delivered by CSOs in some regions. The need to strengthen the response to kinship care is one of the issues discussed below.

It is important to note that while the plan focuses on the family and placement services *sector*, this sector is only one part of the much broader child and family support **service system** that operates within Victoria. The child and family support system consists of a wide range of services funded and/or delivered by other parts of the Office for Children, other divisions of the Department of Human Services and other levels of government. In many ways, the ability of the family and placement services sector to achieve good outcomes for its clients relies on effective relationships across this wider range of services.

Funding

In 2006–07, funding provided by the department for the delivery of family and placement services will total approximately \$241 million. Of this, \$34 million is provided for caregiver reimbursements and \$5 million by way of direct client expense payments to carers. The balance (with the exception of some department-delivered services, such as permanent care, secure welfare services and a small number of residential services) is provided directly to service providers. The funding levels are:

¹¹ Identified as activities 31230 (Family Services) and 31236 (Family Support Innovations Projects) in the Office for Children Policy and Funding Plan.

¹² General, intensive and complex home-based care; adolescent community placement; permanent care; kinship care; lead tenant; and residential care.

¹³ Such as adolescent support services and intensive case management services

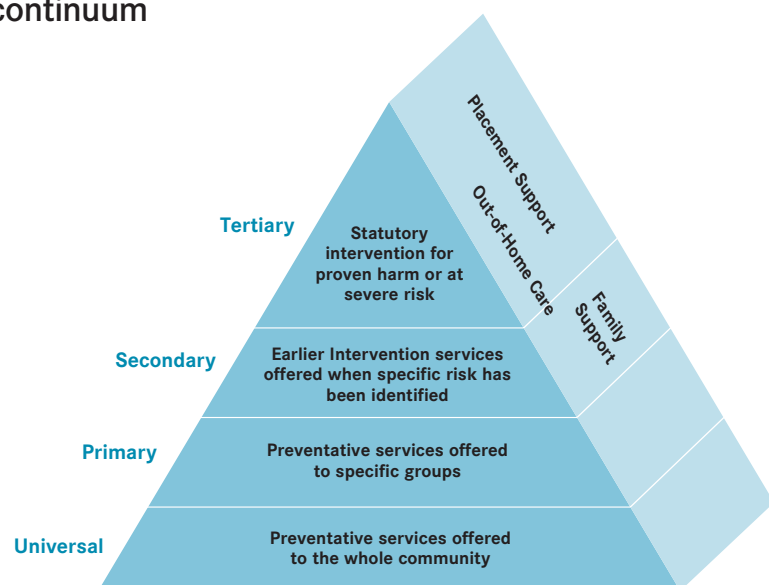
Family services:	\$56.8 million (24 per cent of total)
Out-of-home care:	\$132 million (55 per cent)
Placement support:	\$52 million (22 per cent)

In addition to the funding provided by the Department of Human Services, many CSOs contribute funds from other sources towards the delivery of family and placement services.

The place of the sector

Figure 1.1 illustrates where family and placement services ‘fit’ within the continuum of universal, primary, secondary and tertiary child and family services. As can be seen this sector operates primarily at the secondary and tertiary end of the continuum. One of the challenges the plan is to strengthen connections across the broad sweep of child and family focused services throughout each part of the continuum – whether these be delivered by services funded by the Office for Children, other parts of the department or other government departments.

Figure 1.1 Family and placement services – their place in the continuum



(Adapted from diagram in *The report of the panel to oversee the consultation on protecting children: the Child Protection Outcomes Project* Allen Consulting Group, 2003)

Origins of the plan

As noted in the Foreword, the need for a sector development plan was a recommendation of *Pathways to partnership – the final report of the out-of-home care partnership case study review* (Department of Human Services, June 2003).

In March 2004, the Hon Sherryl Garbutt, Minister for Children and Minister for Community Services, announced the development of a family and placement services sector development plan (the ‘plan’). A steering committee was established to:

- identify the current and future challenges facing the sector
- identify the actions required to meet these challenges
- develop realistic and achievable processes for meeting these challenges.

The steering committee, which was made up of representatives of CSOs and the department, established five working groups¹⁴ whose task it was to explore and report on key issues relevant to the overall wellbeing and future of the sector. Members of the steering committee and working groups are listed in Attachment 4. Information provided by organisations and individual workers to these working groups forms the basis for the series of three background papers¹⁵ and a study, upon which this plan is based.

The policy landscape – related work and initiatives

It is important that the plan is viewed within the context of the broader policy framework and the range of initiatives underway at the whole of Victorian Government and Office for Children levels.

Whole of Victorian Government

The Victorian Government policy setting is reflected in three major recent policy statements which set reform directions and priorities for all areas of human services. They are:

Growing Victoria Together, which sets out the government’s priorities for the next ten years. Amongst other things, Growing Victoria Together includes a commitment to ensuring:

¹⁴ The working groups were Scenario Planning, Systems Governance and Performance Monitoring, Funding Models and Viability, Physical Systems and Infrastructure, and Workforce Planning

¹⁵ Available at www.dhs.vic.gov.au/sectordevelopment

- high quality accessible health and community services
- friendly, confident and safe communities
- a fairer society that reduces disadvantage and respects diversity.

A Fairer Victoria, creating opportunity and addressing disadvantage, which is the government's action plan to address social disadvantage. This policy statement commits to:

- ensuring universal services provide equal access to all
- reducing barriers to opportunity through earlier intervention and prevention
- providing better coordinated and more localised services
- strengthening assistance to disadvantaged groups and highest areas of risk
- involving communities in decision making, to make it easier to work with government.

Putting children first...the next steps, which describes the government's aspirations for children from birth through to school. It commits to:

- expanding access to quality learning and developmental programs, especially within child care settings
- delivering a wider range of supports for parents, including vulnerable families establishing more coordinated and conveniently located children's and family services
- responding to diverse local needs, promoting community collaboration and giving local communities a significant say in planning, developing and delivering services.

Office for Children

The sector development plan has a clear link with the strategic directions established by the policy white paper, *Protecting children...the next steps*, and its focus on building a flexible, skilled workforce, timely and effective services, necessary infrastructure and productive and sustainable organisations. The implementation of the new *Children, Youth and Families Act (2005)* is also of significance to the plan and, to some extent, dependent upon it. In addition, several other projects are underway within the Office for Children which provide a further context to the plan. These are discussed briefly below.

The Plan for Victoria's Children

In December 2004, the Premier of Victoria, the Hon Steve Bracks MP, announced that the government would develop a plan for Victoria's children, covering the years from before birth to a child's transition to school. This announcement was in response to the Premier's Children's Advisory Committee recommendation that a masterplan should be developed to guide the Victorian Government and local governments, local communities and local organisations in working with young children and their families.

In responding to this recommendation, the Victorian Government has started work on a 'statewide plan'. Consultations on the statewide plan were undertaken in late 2005 and early 2006. Amongst the key issues to emerge to date is the difficulties that vulnerable families have in engaging universal services, such as maternal and child health and kindergartens, and targeted services. The statewide plan will seek to address this issue in collaboration with the family and placement service providers and universal service providers who both deliver services to these vulnerable groups.

The key advisory structure for the statewide plan, the Victorian Children's Council, currently contains members who also sit on the Minister for Children and Minister for Community Service's Ministerial Advisory Committee on Vulnerable Children, Young People and Families (MAC). Members from both groups also sit on the steering committee for this sector development plan. Common membership is one way to ensure links between the two pieces of work; the proposed role for the MAC to monitor progress and lead the regular reviews of this plan is another.

Outcomes framework for Victoria's children – Victorian Child Health and Wellbeing Survey

The Statewide Outcomes Branch of the Office for Children is developing an outcomes framework for Victoria's children. The framework concerns all children, but will also focus on two priority populations of great significance to this plan – children and young people in out-of-home care and Aboriginal children and young people.

Performance against the outcomes framework will be monitored through the Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System (VCAMS), which will draw data from many sources across government and non-government organisations. A significant component of the VCAMS will be a rolling program of new data collections related to the general population of children and priority population groups, including Aboriginal children and families, recent immigrant and refugee children and families, children with disabilities, and children who experience chronic disadvantage. The first of these

new collections is the Victorian Child Health and Wellbeing Survey which was completed on 31 March 2006. The survey was a computer assisted telephone interview survey of primary caregivers of randomly selected children aged 0–12 throughout Victoria. Only children in parental care were part of this survey.

To supplement this work, a second survey to commence in 2006 of the 0–18 years out-of-home care population is proposed. The survey instrument, sampling framework and survey methodology is currently being developed. This survey will provide valuable baseline data to enable comparative analysis of outcomes for the 'at home' and 'out-of-home' populations in Victoria.

Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) on Vulnerable Children, Young People and Families – strategic plan for older children and young people

One of the three priority areas to be addressed by the MAC during 2006 is the development of a strategic plan for older children and young people. The need for this plan acknowledges the fact that the statewide plan for children described above has a focus on children from birth to eight years. The work of the MAC in this area will link with broader work within the Office for Youth in the Department of Victorian Communities on the development of a refocused youth policy for all young people aged 12–25 years. That work will build on the achievements of *Respect: the government's vision for young people*. It will also link with work underway in the Office for Children on the redevelopment of our response to the needs of high risk adolescents involved with the statutory Child Protection Service.

What is the plan?

One of the issues the steering committee has had to consider is the nature of this plan – what is a sector development plan? The committee was not able to be guided by similar existing plans developed in other jurisdictions of Australia. While some similar sectors in other jurisdictions have produced plans described as 'industry plans', these were limited in nature and were prepared for sectors at a different stage of development to Victoria's family and placement services sector.

The literature on business planning is wide and there is a range of different types of planning—terms such as 'industry planning', 'long-term planning' and 'strategic planning' are used frequently.

Through the consultation on the plan, senior sector representatives identified the need to develop a stronger, long term approach to planning and a pattern of planning and review activities most commonly associated with **strategic planning**.

There is a range of views as to what constitutes a valid approach to strategic planning within the public sector. This is an issue explored recently in the Auditor-General's report, *Our children are our future: improving outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care*.¹⁶ The Auditor-General recommended that the Department of Human Services should develop a strategic plan for the reform of out-of-home care (a narrower sector than family and placement services). While the department's view was that the Auditor-General had taken too narrow a view of what constitutes a valid approach to strategic planning in the public sector – focusing too heavily on the 'rational planning' approach – it did acknowledge that work underway with this sector development plan is one way to address this recommendation.

Following is a definition of what constitutes an effective rational planning approach to strategic planning:

Strategic planning is a complex and ongoing process of organisational change. The following attributes, when combined, effectively define a successful and comprehensive strategic planning process.

Strategic planning:

- Is oriented towards the future, and focuses on the anticipated future. It looks at how the world could be different 5–10 years from now. It is aimed at creating the organisation's future based on what this future is likely to look like.
- Is based on thorough analysis of foreseen or predicted trends and scenarios of the possible alternative futures, as well as the analysis of internal and external data.
- Is flexible and oriented towards the big picture. It aligns an organisation with its environment, establishing a context for accomplishing goals, and providing a framework and direction to achieve organisation's desired future.
- Creates a framework for achieving competitive advantage by thoroughly analysing the organisation, its internal and external environment, and its potential. This enables organisations to respond to the emerging trends, events, challenges, and opportunities within the framework of its vision and mission, developed through the strategic planning process.

- Is a qualitative, idea driven process. It integrates "soft" data, not always supported quantitatively, such as experiences, intuition, and ideas, involves the organisation in the ongoing dialogue, and aims to provide a clear organisational vision and focus.
- Allows organisations to focus, because it is a process of dynamic, continuous activities of self-analysis
- Is an ongoing, continuous learning process, an organisational dialogue, which extends beyond attaining a set of predetermined goals. It aims to change the way an organisation thinks and operates, and create a learning organisation.
- When successful, it influences all areas of operations, becoming a part of the organisation's philosophy and culture.¹⁷

As articulated throughout this document, the process adopted in developing this plan is consistent with many, if not all, of the components of a strategic planning process as described here. The steering committee has articulated a vision for clients and the service system and a set of objectives, and has stated how it wants the sector to change in future in order to meet this vision. The committee has undertaken an analysis of the current environment, identified challenges, built in a flexible approach to reviewing and revising the plan in recognition that no plan of this nature can be a static document, and has drawn on 'qualitative' as well as 'quantitative' evidence.

It is important to note that one major way the committee diverges from the picture of strategic planning described above is that this plan focuses on planning at the **system** level as opposed to the level of the individual organisation. This represents a significant step forward for the sector. It is also a shift down a path that many regions have already started and in a direction that has been long advocated for, as articulated in the following quote taken from *Pathways to partnership: the final report of the out-of-home care partnership case study review*:¹⁸

A perceived weakness of Victoria's child welfare system is the fragmentation of service provision across numerous providers. Vinson and Hornibrook through the NSW "Working Together" Project place significant emphasis upon the development of managed and integrated regional service systems to overcome this problem.

¹⁷ <http://www.des.calstate.edu/strategic.html>, California State University, Northridge, USA.

¹⁸ *Pathways to partnership: the final report of the out-of-home care partnership case study review*, Department of Human Services, June 2003

They attribute this 'long standing problem' to:

“... the continued operation of a tradition that has emphasized separate organizational rather than collaborative attainments in the community service field. Nevertheless, the modern reality of the transfer of very substantial public funds to non-government social agencies, was bound to entail identity, value and administrative consequences for the latter. An identity as a totally independent agency, free to sustain established goals and programs without careful regard to the propriety needs of the population being serviced and the available resources of the community, is increasingly difficult when public rather than private funding is to the fore.”

They go on to argue that the new administrative imperative is:

“...the merging of older conceptions of separate service organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, into an integrated system that needs to be managed as a system and held accountable for effective service provision in the context of local needs and conditions¹⁹.”

This plan's focus on planning for a sector provides a platform for the development of a sector or area based approach to monitoring service effectiveness. One of the tasks for the group charged with monitoring and reviewing the plan (discussed in Section 3), therefore, will be to connect with work underway in this area (for example, through the outcomes framework discussed above) and use it as the basis for more clearly articulating a set of measures for monitoring the overall health of the sector in future at both the statewide and local level.

Service responses to Aboriginal children, youth and families

At the time the decision to develop this plan was first made, it was recognised that there would need to be a focus on the service response to Aboriginal children, young people and families, in recognition of their over-representation within the placement and support system and the under-representation of Aboriginal families within family services.

This raises a range of capacity-related issues for service providers and issues of partnership and resource transfer between mainstream and Indigenous providers. The need to build a strategy around Aboriginal service capacity was one of the major themes emerging from the recent consultations with Aboriginal communities on the legislative reforms and the plan picks up on this recommendation.

¹⁹ Vinson, T and Hornibrook, J (2001) *Visible signs of a well-functioning community service system*, quoted in *Pathways to partnership*, op cit, p. 8.

The following paragraphs are taken directly from Background paper 1 which was developed as part of the work of this Plan:

The Indigenous population exhibits markedly different demographic characteristics to the general Victorian population. In particular, it is much younger. It is likely that the child and young persons portion of the Indigenous population will increase by approximately 27 per cent by 2016, thus being a significant driver of additional demand for services for children at risk.

Children and adolescents from an Aboriginal background are significantly over-represented among those who require family and placement services throughout Australia. In 2002, 13 per cent of the children in care in Victoria were of Aboriginal background, although they accounted for just one per cent of the total number of children in the same age groups (0 to 17 years). Victoria has the lowest proportion of Aboriginal Australians in the general community of any state, at 0.6 per cent.

A major reason for this over-representation is almost certainly that Aboriginal Australians suffer significant social disadvantage on a wide range of indicators, including life expectancy, average income, labour force participation, level of educational attainment, and rates of hospitalisation. The effects of the Stolen Generation continue to impact on Aboriginal children and families and their use of family and placement services²⁰.”

These paragraphs summarise the challenge facing Victoria’s Aboriginal community and the organisations that support this community.

At the organisational level, Aboriginal service providers face a range of issues that other non-Aboriginal organisations either do not face, or do not face to the same degree, including:

- the tensions that arise between organisations and the communities they serve, due to the relationship between the organisation’s work and past policies and practices by government departments in relation to child welfare within the Aboriginal community
- difficulty in attracting and retaining suitably skilled and qualified staff – due partly to the aforementioned tensions and partly to a smaller available pool to draw upon

20 Victorian families, children and their carers in 2016 – A copy of this paper can be found on the sector development plan website at: www.dhs.vic.gov.au/sectordevelopment

- multiple and heavy consultation demands placed on the staff of Aboriginal organisations by the department with no allowance made for the impact of this in funding arrangements
- multiple reporting requirements imposed on these organisations due to the often more numerous funding lines available to them
- a tendency to fund projects within Aboriginal services on a non-recurrent basis and without adequate allowance for infrastructure.

Department of Human Services Aboriginal Services Plan

The emphasis on ensuring that the plan is strong with regard to its focus on the needs of Aboriginal communities is consistent with the Victorian Government's and the Department of Human Services' commitments as articulated in the *Aboriginal Services Plan*. The *Aboriginal Services Plan* states the following:

The Victorian Government's policy for Aboriginal people, *Reconciliation and Respect*, addresses Aboriginal social and economic disadvantage and progresses reconciliation. The Victorian Government's vision for reconciliation is to create a society that:

- is proud of its Aboriginal heritage
- addresses the dispossession and disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal people
- heals the hurt of past injustice
- commits to build a positive future²¹

Consistent with this whole-of-government vision, the Aboriginal Services Plan also states:

The Department of Human Services is the successor to a number of government departments. In following former government policies, those departments were responsible for a range of harmful practices. Major challenges for the Department of Human Services are to:

- recognise the effects of those past practices
- acknowledge that current practices need improvement
- listen to Aboriginal people
- work collaboratively for a better future...²²

²¹ *Aboriginal Services Plan, Department of Human Services, January 2004, p. 10*

²² *Ibid, p. 8*

The Department of Human Services is committed to improving the cultural, spiritual and emotional health, social and economic wellbeing of Aboriginal people in Victoria by:

- incorporating Aboriginal needs, issues and positive outcomes in all planning through consultation with key stakeholders and Aboriginal communities
- providing a holistic, coordinated approach to improving the responsiveness and accessibility of its services for the Aboriginal community in Victoria
- addressing the disproportionate number of Aboriginal people in institutions and state care, especially within the juvenile justice, child protection and alternative care systems
- assisting Aboriginal organisations to develop Indigenous models of practice that enhance the lives of Victorian Aboriginal people
- empowering Aboriginal communities to collaborate as partners
- providing support to build the capacity of Aboriginal managed community and health services across Victoria
- recognising the impact of past policies on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal communities
- increasing the understanding of Aboriginal identity and experience within the portfolio and in the broader community
- implementing recommendations from the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* and the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*
- increasing the number of Aboriginal people employed within the portfolio
- increasing the number of Aboriginal people in decision making positions
- eliminating systemic racism in the workplace.²³

The way the committee has approached the work of this plan is consistent with the *Aboriginal Services Plan* and it also builds on the process of the recent legislative review, which was conducted in a way that is consistent with the commitments given in the *Aboriginal Services Plan*. The result of the consultative work with Aboriginal communities throughout the legislative review process is articulated in the policy framework contained in *Protecting Children...the next steps*. As that paper notes:

The Victorian Government is committed to working with Aboriginal communities to:

- Strengthen families and communities;
- Prevent so many Aboriginal children and young people entering out of home care;
- Where children cannot remain safely at home, maintain strong links to their culture and community ²⁴

If this commitment is to be met, it is clear that much work is needed. To this end, the white paper commits to eight actions targeted at Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities, which are listed in Attachment 4. These actions were reflected in the second reading speech for the *Children, Youth and Families Bill (2005)* which was delivered by the Hon Sherryl Garbutt, Minister for Children and Minister for Community Services, in Parliament on 6 October 2005. Extracts from that speech are quoted here:

The Children, Youth and Families Bill also contains new provisions to more effectively support Aboriginal families, so that we reduce the very high overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection system.

New approaches to earlier intervention will be tailored to meet the needs of Aboriginal children and families. This depends on all levels of government working with communities and community-controlled organisations to strengthen their capacity to help families earlier and prevent crises.

Our reforms emphasise the importance of building robust, viable and skilled Aboriginal agencies, so that Aboriginal families and communities have access to services that are managed and delivered by Aboriginal people. We need to work with these agencies to increase community understanding about where families can go for help and the roles, responsibilities and decision-making processes of community-based services and child protection services alike.

A consistent theme of the reforms is to empower Aboriginal families and communities to make decisions about how best to strengthen their families, protect their children and promote their healthy development. The bill promotes the use of Aboriginal family decision making, whereby an Aboriginal convenor facilitates a meeting of family members to plan how to assure children's safety

and better promote their healthy development. We want to explore opportunities to use family decision-making processes as early as possible.

Extended family, community members and professionals working with the family will be involved, as appropriate.

Our reforms also recognise the need for mainstream services to support Aboriginal children and families. All child, youth and family services need to be culturally inclusive and culturally responsive. Under the Bill, all community services – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike – will be required to build cultural competence and to demonstrate compliance with new cultural standards. These standards will be developed in consultation with Aboriginal communities and community-controlled organisations.

Where children cannot live safely at home, we want new legislation to help keep children connected to their family and culture. Where an Aboriginal child or young person cannot live safely at home, the bill therefore requires community services and child protection to take account of the Aboriginal child placement principle in making decisions about the placement of the child. This principle emphasises that the highest priority should be given to placing a child within their extended family and then within their community. For children placed in non-Aboriginal placements, the bill provides for the making of cultural plans, which will detail how cultural connection will be maintained. On a case-by-case basis, cultural plans will be developed in consultation with families and community-controlled agencies. The Children's Court will have the authority to make cultural plans a condition of various orders.

Consistent with our aim of empowering community decision making, a longer term reform is to transfer the responsibility for making decisions about Aboriginal children to Aboriginal communities.

The *Children, Youth and Families Bill* enables the Secretary of the Department of Human Services to assign responsibility for managing a court order to the head of an approved Aboriginal organisation.

The government will work with Aboriginal organisations to build their capacity to assume greater case planning and case management responsibilities for Aboriginal children involved in child protection.

The effect of the reforms will be that Aboriginal children, young people and families will receive more effective early intervention and prevention services, so that we keep Aboriginal families together. Where Aboriginal children cannot live safely with their parents, they will be more likely to reside with their extended families in kinship care arrangements. If this is not possible and children cannot be placed with extended family, more will be done to ensure that they maintain greater links to their community and culture.

Aboriginal families and communities will have more say in the protection of children from earlier intervention through to the Children's Court.²⁵

It is essential that this plan achieves two things with regard to our Aboriginal organisations and communities:

1. It must identify actions that are targeted at addressing issues that are unique to or more significant for Aboriginal organisations and communities.
2. It must ensure that any general/sector-wide recommendations or actions are implemented in a way that makes them effective for and relevant to Aboriginal organisations and communities.

In doing this, the plan must start to head towards the fulfillment of the commitments already given in the Aboriginal Services Plan, the white paper and the new *Children, Youth and Families Act (2005)*.

Section 2 Our vision and aspirations

Guiding principles

Section 1 discussed the system level focus of this plan as opposed to the level of the individual organisation. Nonetheless, the goal of the plan is improved outcomes for the children and families who access services, as well as for the service system.

The two pieces of legislation that underpin the work of the sector are the *Children, Youth and Families Act (2005)* and the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act (2005)*. Both Acts contain principles that are intended to guide the development and provision of services to children, young people and families.

Sections 10 to 14 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act (2005)* detail the guiding principles for that legislation. Pre-eminent amongst these are the Best interests principles:

“(1) For the purposes of this Act the best interests of the child must always be paramount”.

(2) *When determining whether a decision or action is in the best interest of the child, the need to protect the child from harm, to protect his or her rights and to promote his or her development (taking into account his or her age and stage of development) must always be considered*²⁶.

This notion of ensuring the best interests of the child is one that must shape every aspect of the services this sector provides, and the plan must be concerned with assisting organisations to do this.

The new *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act (2005)* also contains a range of principles for children which apply to all services funded by the Office for Children that work with children, young people and families. A number of the principles bear direct relevance to this notion of an integrated system of services that share a common vision:

²⁶ *Children, Youth and Families Act (2005), State of Victoria, section 10, page 21*

(5) Principles for children

- (1) The development and provision of services for children and families should be based upon the fundamental principles that:
 - (a) society as a whole shares responsibility for promoting the wellbeing and safety of children;...
 - (c) those who develop and provide services, as well as parents, should give the highest priority to the promotion and protection of a child's safety, health, development, education and wellbeing...

- (2) Services for children and families should be designed and developed:...
 - (b) to accord with the needs of each local community with the active involvement of that community's cultural groups, and to be accessible and responsive to the particular cultures, languages and circumstances of the community and to be properly planned and co-ordinated with services provided by other local and regional communities;...

- (3) The providers of services to children and families should:
 - (e) co-operate with other services or professionals to work in the interests of the child and family²⁷.

These principles provide further impetus for this plan and for the family and placement service system to ensure that it continues to focus efforts on more coordinated and joined up ways of working together at the local level.

Vision

The Cambridge Dictionary defines 'vision' as ***“the ability to imagine how a country, society, industry, etc. could develop in the future and to plan in a suitable way”***.

This definition provides a good summary of the core task of this plan. This section discusses Victoria's vision for all of its children and young people; our vision for the vulnerable children and young people are involved in this sector; the subsequent vision for the sector; and some of the ways the sector needs to develop if the vision is to be fulfilled.

The vision adopted for all children is the one developed as part of the work for the statewide plan for children and the associated outcomes framework:

Every child thrives, learns and grows, is valued and respected (to become an effective adult).

While this vision applies to all children, it is important to acknowledge that the family and placement services sector exists first and foremost to provide services to Victoria's vulnerable children, young people and families. Therefore, this overarching vision needs to be supplemented by a vision for the groups that rely on our services:

To give families and communities the help they need to provide Victoria's vulnerable children and young people with the best possible start in life.

Following on from this child-focused vision, it is also important to consider a vision for the broader service system, that is, the characteristics the service system must possess if it is to be able to achieve the child-centred vision described above. This vision is articulated in the following way:

Positive outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and families in Victoria will be achieved through a collaborative service system of skilled and sustainable community service organisations working in a robust partnership with other services, government and the wider community

Figure 2.1 illustrates a framework for family and placement services. It begins with a vision for all children and ends with a vision for the sector and a summary of the characteristics the sector will need to develop if this vision is to be met. This framework provides the basis for the development of the plan.

Figure 2.1: Family and placement services outcomes framework



Characteristics of the sector

The framework depicted in Figure 2.1 requires further discussion, particularly around the characteristics of the sector that must be developed if the vision and objectives are to be fulfilled.

As part of the background work to developing the plan, the following consultations were held:

- Four consultations were held during October 2005 with leaders of the family and placement services sector. More than 100 senior staff representing 40 organisations attended these consultations.
- The CREATE Foundation conducted two focus group consultations with children and young people with a care experience. Young people from all regions were invited to participate in the consultations. Nine young people from the Eastern, Southern and Barwon regions were able to participate. A summary of the key themes and recommendations arising from this consultation is provided as Attachment 3²⁸.
- A consultation with representatives of Aboriginal service providers was held in February 2006.
- A consultation on the draft of the plan was held in February 2006 and attended by 40 senior representatives of the family and placement services sector from 20 organisations.
- Opportunities for written and verbal feedback on various papers produced during the life of the plan were provided.

The October consultations asked about the challenges facing the sector currently and how we would know – in ten years' time – whether or not this plan had been successful. What would the characteristics of a strong and effective family and placement services sector be? In other words, what will we need to do to meet our vision? The February consultations confirmed and clarified the first iteration of these challenges and characteristics, and these are detailed below:

Listening to children, young people, families and communities – the system must be shaped so that it seeks and is guided by the different stakeholders, especially in regard to the need to hear the voices of children and young people in care²⁹.

²⁸ The key themes and recommendations arising from the CREATE consultation are particularly instructive – especially with regard to the issues identified around needing to focus more on hearing the voice of children and young people in care. The outcomes of the consultation will inform work under way in this area.

²⁹ As noted above, Attachment 3 provides a summary of consultations undertaken by CREATE with children and young people with a care experience to inform this Plan. The attachment is very informative on this issue in particular.

Outcomes driven – service effectiveness must be judged on the outcomes achieved, and these must be evaluated and systematically monitored and used to highlight strengths and deficits to drive further practice improvements.

Increasing our focus on earlier³⁰ intervention – vulnerable families must receive effective help earlier to provide care for their children. As a result, there will be fewer notifications, fewer re-notifications and fewer children will need to enter deeper into the child protection system (including out-of-home care).

When children must become involved with the out-of-home care system, their needs must be quickly assessed and responded to in order to maximise the likelihood of achieving stability, preferably back with family or, in some instances, in alternative long-term care.

Stronger service models – flexibility, innovation and evidence must inform and enable the introduction of more effective service models across the continuum of service from family support to out-of-home care.

More research and improved evidence base – policy and practice must be driven by a greatly enhanced focus on research, innovation and evidence of what works. Research should also impact on broader government understanding of the sector (particularly relevant to Treasury).

A stable and effective paid workforce – paid staff must have manageable workloads; be better trained, supported and paid; have more opportunities for advancement and clearer career paths. As a result, the workforce will be more stable and effective, which will contribute to better outcomes for children, young people and families.

A better supported and growing volunteer workforce – volunteers must be better supported, trained and respected; and, in the case of home-based care, more fairly reimbursed and recognised as genuine members of each child's care team. This will, at least partially, address attrition rates amongst the existing carer population and similarly strengthen and normalise the family support response.

³⁰ Throughout this document the terms 'earlier intervention' or 'intervening earlier' are used. These terms are used to apply to intervention that occurs as soon as a child, young person or family's vulnerability has been identified. By contrast, the term 'early intervention' refers to intervention at a stage before vulnerability has been identified and therefore applies to more universal services which are not a focus of the plan.

Strong, viable Aboriginal organisations – existing Aboriginal service providers must be strengthened to provide more and better services to their community. This will contribute to having fewer Indigenous children in care; and more Indigenous children who are in care will be cared for within community.

Well supported kinship carers – the predicted growth in kinship care and fall in foster carer availability makes the absence of a systematic approach to kinship carer support untenable. Kinship carers must be better supported by well developed and effective service models.

A supportive community – we must promote a better understanding of the value and complexity of the work of the sector within the broader community. We must also ensure that staff of the sector fully appreciate and value the importance of the work they do.

Fair funding – service providers must receive funding that truly reflects the cost of service provision and enables high quality services to be provided.

Working together within government – a real whole-of-government approach will exist with all areas and levels of government working together to improve the response to the myriad needs of vulnerable families, children and young people.

True partnership – funded community organisations and the department will work together to achieve shared objectives. The differences between the two will be acknowledged and respected. Service providers will have an active voice in the development and implementation of policy.

Greater focus on planning ahead – a greater focus on long-term planning will enable the sector to become proactive, rather than reactive.

These characteristics provide the starting point for our discussion of the plan, detailed in Section 4.

Section 3 Monitoring and reviewing the plan

As noted previously, this is only the first iteration of the plan. If the plan is to be effective, and if the sector is to meet the overall developmental aim of a greater focus on planning and equipping itself for current needs, it is essential that processes are put in place for reviewing and revising the plan.

Advisory structures

Background paper 2 contained a discussion on the issue of systems governance, in which it adopted the following definition:

Integrated (systems) governance describes the structure of formal and informal relations to manage affairs through collaborative approaches between government agencies and the non-government sector³¹.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the broad advisory structure now established to support the work of the Office for Children. The diagram should be read as a matrix with the vertical axis indicating the sphere of influence the advisory structure works within, and the horizontal axis the nature of the advice the structure provides – ranging from high level policy advice to advice focused more on aspects of direct service delivery. Thus, the Victorian Children’s Council is depicted as providing high level policy advice to the whole of the Victorian Government, while the Child Protection and Family Services Advisory Group (CP&FSAG) is depicted as providing advice centred on policy and service coordination and service delivery to the Office for Children.

The structures at the regional level are not presented in a detailed way in the diagram to allow for variation in regional structures and titles of groups. However, the basic principle is that at the regional level all participants of the family and placement services sector will participate in regular regional structures where issues concerning the regional service system are discussed and planned for. Where issues identified at the regional level have a wider application or relevance, they will be communicated to the branch-specific advisory structure (the CP&FSAG) by the regional representatives on that group. Where information is provided to members of the CP&FSAG, it can be communicated to all regional stakeholders.

31 Success Works (2002), Working together – integrated governance, March p. i

Monitoring the plan

One of the primary responsibilities of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Vulnerable Children, Young People and Families, whose role includes the provision of high level policy advice to the Minister for Children, will be to oversee implementation of the plan, including:

- monitoring progress of actions against agreed timelines
- identifying where the balance of responsibility for actioning certain items lies, across the spectrum of the department, individual organizations, regional structures and the sector's peak bodies
- identifying the range of client and systems outcomes measures to be monitored systematically to assess the ongoing health and effectiveness of the sector
- identifying additional issues that future plans must address
- identifying additional areas for research to inform future plans
- every two years re-issuing a revised plan, which becomes the basis of future monitoring³².

Each new plan developed by the group would be the subject of broad sector consultation before finalisation, with the CP&FSAG being the primary vehicle for such consultation. Regional representatives on the CP&FSAG will be responsible for ensuring that feedback on progress against the plan was discussed at the regional level through the regional structures in place.

32 It must be noted that the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Vulnerable Children, Young People and Families was established by the Hon Sherryl Garbutt in her capacity as Minister for Children and Minister for Community Services. The terms of reference and responsibilities granted to the MAC, therefore, are granted by Minister Garbutt and they are not binding on any future Minister.

Geographic considerations

One of the issues that will require further consideration as the plan is reviewed and monitored is the regional and/or sub-regional structures in place for planning, communication and network building between services.

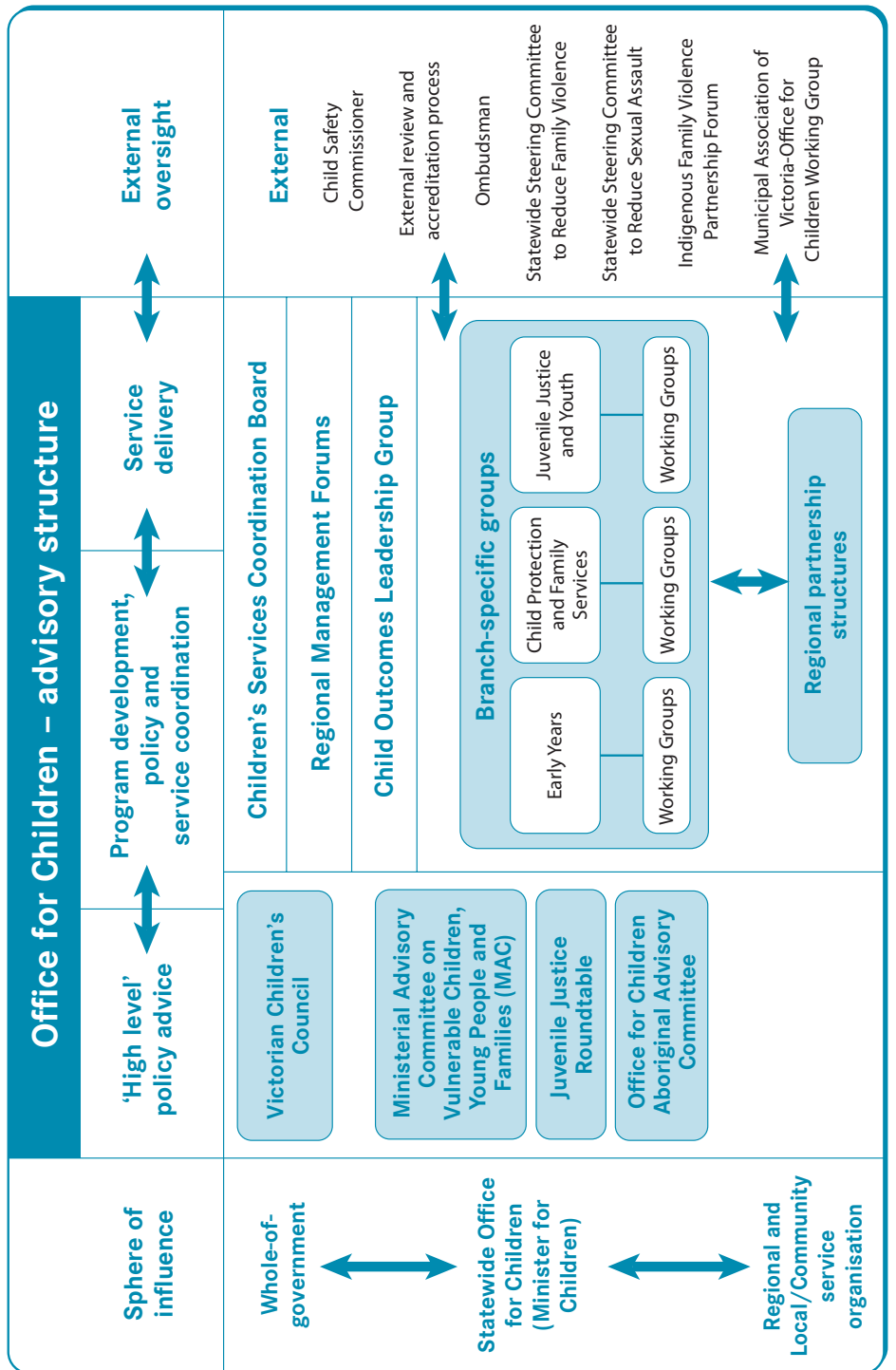
As the Family Support Innovation projects expand, local family services planning arrangements have been aligned with the Family Support Innovation catchments. Future planning envisages these local planning catchments will, in most cases, broadly align with the existing Primary Care Partnership catchments, creating approximately 31 family services sub-regional catchments across the state. These sub-regional areas will largely comprise 2–3 local government areas and will also form the geographic platform for the proposed community-based intake.

While family services planning arrangements and the community-based intake will operate at a sub-regional level, family services may continue to be delivered at a single local government area level, reflecting local historical arrangements. Most regions have also established region-wide family services planning mechanisms, in conjunction with CSOs delivering family services, to consider broader statewide developments (for example, the new *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*) that may impact upon family services.

The situation for placement services is somewhat different, with most regions planning for services on a region-wide basis and with this process supported by various versions of the Regional Partnership Planning groups established in late 2003 (or earlier in some regions). The strength of networks at the regional level varies, with some regions further along in the process of developing a placement service system that plans and views itself as a regional service as opposed to a set of individual service providers.

One of the challenges in this regard, particularly but not exclusively for rural regions, is that of distance. How do you meaningfully develop a network of providers over a distance such as that from Bendigo to Mildura? Should planning for placement services occur along similar catchments to those proposed for the community-based intakes? These are issues that regions must grapple with to ensure that all parts of all regions are adequately enabled to participate in planning processes and that vulnerable children, young people and families benefit from a more networked approach to service delivery at the regional level

Figure 3.1: Office for Children advisory structure



Section 4 – Moving forward – The plan

- This section sets out the first iteration of the plan. It consists of three subsections. **Section 4.1** outlines eight challenges facing the sector and why they exist, and describes what we want the future characteristics of the sector to be. This work builds on the consultations and background work undertaken during the planning process, as well as on previous analyses of the challenges of the sector, as discussed in Section 2.

The challenges identified as requiring action are as follows:

1. Inadequately defined approach to partnership between government, service providers and service users, which includes an inadequate definition of each party's roles and responsibilities.
2. Inadequate service coordination and leadership at the regional and statewide levels.
3. A reactive service system, driven by system, organisational and external pressures rather than a focus on achieving improved outcomes for children, young people and families, and acting in a way that is informed by research and best practice.
4. Service models that have not kept pace with the changing nature and rising complexity of the children, young people and families the services are for, and which need to ensure a stronger focus on earlier intervention.
5. A declining volunteer workforce within out-of-home care and a need to better harness and support the potential volunteer resource that exists in other parts of the service system.
6. Aboriginal children, young people and families under-represented in family support services and over-represented in placement services. Many Aboriginal children and young people are losing contact with their culture and communities. Services must be more responsive and culturally aware.
7. Little understanding of the nature and value of the work of this sector within the broader community and an undervaluing of the work within the sector itself.
8. Failure to regularly update and revise funding models to reflect increasing complexity.

As can be seen, these challenges fall into one of two categories:

1. Those related to the issue of governance: ‘...the structure of formal and informal relations to manage affairs through collaborative approaches between government agencies and the non-government sector’³³.
2. Those related to service effectiveness and sustainability.

In other words, the challenges relate to the systems in place to manage, monitor and refine how we work and ensure maximum effectiveness, and the service models and processes established that are our core activity.

Section 4.2 details the first iteration of the plan and outlines the steps that must be taken to address the current challenges. The plan allocates a priority status for each action as follows:

- Priority A – action implemented within 12 months
- Priority B – developmental work commenced within 12 months and implemented within two years

The plan begins with the aspirational statement of ‘where we want to be’, identified in Section 4.1, and then details actions required to get there. The following is a summary of the actions the plan commits us to over the next two years. It is the progress against these actions that will be monitored, as discussed in Section 3.

Table 4.1: Summary of Actions 2006–2008

Action	Priority	Lead Responsibility
STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE		
Strengthening advisory structures and planning		
Establish the advisory structure as detailed in this paper	A	Office for Children
Child Protection and Family Services Advisory Group to clearly articulate agreed principles for inclusion of the sector in planning and development of policy initiatives – to be built on the existing Partnership Agreement between the Department of Human Services and funded health, housing and community sector organisations and the collaboration and consultation principles for the department and the health, housing and community sector	A	CP&FSAG
Establish and support Aboriginal service providers network to ensure effective operation and participation	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Facilitate planning process between multi-region community service organisations to achieve more service-user friendly and less fragmented agency deployment	A	Multi-region CSOs
Develop a ‘leadership bank’ approach for identified sector leaders aimed at developing leadership skills	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Draft statement of roles and responsibilities for effecting positive change within the sector between the department, peak bodies, regions and community service organisations	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Strengthening the focus on outcomes		
Develop measures of service system effectiveness and monitor on an ongoing basis	A	MAC
Establish an outcomes framework for Victoria’s children and commence monitoring via the Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System	A	Office for Children (Statewide Outcomes Branch)
Establish priority populations outcomes framework (Aboriginal children and children in out-of-home care)	B	Office for Children (Statewide Outcomes Branch)
STRENGTHENING SERVICE EFFECTIVENESS AND SUSTAINABILITY		
Strengthening the voice of children, young people and families		
Develop, implement and monitor Charter for Children in Care	A	Child Safety Commissioner and Office for Children (CP&FS)
Develop a clear articulation of practice expectations around hearing the voice of children and young people in care, together with materials/publications to support this work	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)

Action	Priority	Lead Responsibility
Strengthening Aboriginal service responsiveness		
Undertake an Aboriginal service capacity building strategy	A	Office for Children
Implement the whole-of-family model of family support within Aboriginal communities	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Consider the establishment of an Aboriginal peak or lead organisation to lead the establishment of this network and support its continuation in consultation with community	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Develop an Aboriginal staff development strategy	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Pilot and evaluate a model of kinship care service delivery within an Aboriginal organisation	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Develop an Aboriginal foster care recruitment strategy	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Further expand Aboriginal Family Decision Making model as funding allows	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Strengthening foster care		
Establish foster carer help line	A	Foster Care Association of Victoria
Train all relevant CSO staff in the delivery of the common competency-based statewide foster carer assessment and training package	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Develop enhanced common training material for foster carers for use by all service providers	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Through ongoing implementation of the Looking After Children framework, re-emphasise the need to ensure all carers are involved in all processes as genuine members of the child's care team	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Implement a new funding model for home-based care	A	Office for Children (CP&FS and Program and Sector Support)
Develop a statewide foster carer recruitment strategy	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Pilot a regional approach to foster care recruitment, assessment and training	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Strengthening the evidence base		
Establish the Felton Chair in Child and Family Welfare	A	Centre for Excellence

Table 4.1: Summary of Actions 2006–2008 (cont)

Action	Priority	Lead Responsibility
Fund research assistant position to support the Chair in Child and Family Welfare	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Establish process for the identification and dissemination of innovative practice within the sector	B	Centre for Excellence
Strengthening service model effectiveness and quality		
Review the family services strategic framework	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Continue planning and rollout of community-based intake across the state	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Pilot and evaluate two models of kinship care service delivery – supported by well articulated guidelines and standards as necessary	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Implement a model of therapeutic foster care	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Develop models of care to accommodate children and young people subject to a Therapeutic Treatment (Placement) Order as defined in the <i>Children, Youth and Families Act (2005)</i> sections 252–258	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Develop an early assessment tool for use with all children and young people entering out-of-home care to identify needs and services required	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Establish process for agency registration which promotes focus on service quality	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Provide recurrent funding to the Centre for Excellence to play a lead role in supporting service providers to meet their service requirements and embed a focus on quality improvement	A	Centre for Excellence
Develop a strategic plan to improve outcomes for children and young people in residential care	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Establish the ‘Hurstbridge Farm’ therapeutic care model (Eastern and North and West regions)	A	Office for Children
Review the approach to permanent care to ensure consistency with the focus on stability within the <i>Children, Youth and Families Act (2005)</i>	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Strengthen the effectiveness of Secure Welfare Services, in particular assist the transition to community placement	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Complete rollout of Family Support Innovations programs across the state	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)

Action	Priority	Lead Responsibility
Develop a model of leaving care support	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Strengthening service sustainability		
Develop and agree on funding principles for all family and placement services	A	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Strengthening workforce		
Develop a five-year workforce planning and training strategy	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Develop volunteer (non-foster care) workforce strategy as part of the workforce planning work	B	Office for Children (CP&FS)
Strengthening the profile		
Develop a strategy for effective communication of the work of the sector	A	MAC

Section 4.3 contains the part of the sector development plan that is relevant to Aboriginal service providers. As detailed in Section 1, the needs of Aboriginal organisations within this sector are both similar to and different from those of mainstream agencies. The plan takes account of this by identifying several actions that are specific to the needs of Aboriginal organisations.

This should not be taken to mean that the strategies for the broader sector are not applicable to Aboriginal organisations. The plan, as detailed in Section 4.2, is applicable to all organisations – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

4.1 Summary of current challenges

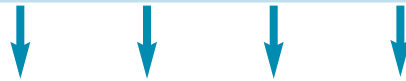
Governance Issue 1: Partnership

Where we are today

An inadequately defined approach to partnership between government, service providers and service users, which includes an inadequate definition of each party's roles and responsibilities

Why we are here and why we need to change

- Tension between the Department of Human Services as purchaser and community sector as the main provider of services – the impact of the power imbalance between the department and CSOs.
- Children, young people and families not consulted adequately in the planning and delivery of services that are for them.
- Insufficient understanding of how to work effectively in partnership with Aboriginal organisations and communities.
- Poor coordination of services for this client group within the Department of Human Services and across departments.



Where we want to be

- Greater inclusion of community sector in the planning and development of policy initiatives and a clearly articulated understanding of what partnership means.
- Robust and systemic approaches to ensuring the voice of all clients is heard as services are planned, delivered and evaluated.
- Structures in place to support effective partnership between Aboriginal organisations, non-Aboriginal organisations and the Department of Human Services.
- Formal structures in place to improve communication and coordination within the department and across government.

Governance Issue 2: Leadership and Co-ordination

Where we are today

Inadequate service coordination and leadership at the regional and statewide levels

Why we are here and why we need to change

- Many organisations with many leaders (both government and non-government) with sometimes competing responsibilities to both their organisation and the service system of which their organisation is a part.
- Lack of opportunity for leaders within the sector to develop their leadership skills.
- Absence of a clearly articulated agreement on an agreed vision and on the responsibilities and roles of key stakeholders for driving service improvements – across the parties of the Department of Human Services, peak bodies, regional structures and individual organisations.



Where we want to be

- Stronger, adequately resourced regional (and some sub-regional) and statewide networks, focused on achieving better outcomes for clients by strengthening the effectiveness of the entire service system.
- Leaders within community services provided with opportunity to enhance their skills.
- Commitment to a shared vision and a clear articulation of the roles and responsibilities of the department, peak bodies, regions and individual CSOs in effecting positive change within the sector.
- Rational and effective deployment of agencies to priority communities. Reduction of overlap, fragmentation and diffusion.

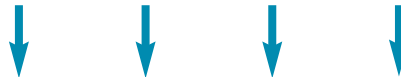
Governance Issue 3: Learning from outcomes

Where we are today

A reactive service system, driven by system, organisational and external pressures, rather than by a focus on achieving improved outcomes for children, young people and families and acting in a way that is informed by research and best practice

Why we are here and why we need to change

- Long-term planning is ad hoc or non-existent, occurs in service silos and without clear structures for oversight and guidance.
- Outcomes and objectives of the service system not clearly defined or adequately communicated across the sector.
- The vulnerability of the client group means a high degree of visibility and public criticism.



Where we want to be

- Formal advisory structures established with clear terms of reference, cross-sector representation and a focus on proactive planning.
- Outcomes and objectives defined, communicated, regularly monitored and reported upon and this information is used by advisory structures to drive service improvements.

Service effectiveness and sustainability Issue 1: Service models

Where we are today

Service models that have not kept pace with the changing nature and rising complexity of the children, young people and families the services are for, and which need to ensure a stronger focus on earlier intervention.

Why we are here and why we need to change

- Increasing demand on dated service models in terms of both volume and the increasingly complex needs of children, young people and families.
- Inadequate focus on research to drive service improvements, inflexible approaches to funding, innovation not encouraged or rewarded.
- The support and training provided to the current workforce has not kept pace with the increasingly complex demands of the children, young people and families they work with.
- Out-of-home care system has not adequately responded to the shift away from foster care and towards kinship care.
- Inadequate focus on the support and training needs of the current Aboriginal service workforce.
- Aboriginal organisations lack the necessary resources to deliver the range of effective services their community needs.



Where we want to be

- A service system that intervenes earlier and appropriately when problems arise – across the continuum of service provision – to reduce service penetration and address the impact of harm.
- Service models better able to meet the needs of, and achieve positive outcomes for, children, young people and families.
- A culture where effective, innovative practice is encouraged, identified, shared, rewarded and built upon.
- Greater investment in research to inform policy and practice.
- A paid workforce that is better supported, better skilled and more capable of achieving positive outcomes for those they work with.
- Service models for effective kinship care support developed and widely implemented.
- A better skilled and supported Aboriginal service workforce.
- Aboriginal organisations able to deliver effective services to their community, resulting in more Aboriginal children being maintained within their family and community.

Service effectiveness and sustainability Issue 2: Volunteer workforce

Where we are today

A declining volunteer workforce within out-of-home care and a need to better harness and support the potential volunteer resource that exists in other parts of the service system.

Why we are here and why we need to change

- The support and training provided to the current volunteer workforce has not kept pace with the increasingly complex demands of the children, young people and families they work with.
- Demographic changes (for example, more women in the workforce).
- Recruitment practices are fragmented and ineffective.
- Carers leaving the system feeling a lack of respect and recognition – not enough attention being given to these issues.
- Within foster care, a failure to harness potential for identifying volunteers to undertake a role of duties broader than just sole caring responsibility.



Where we want to be

- A volunteer workforce which is better supported, better skilled and more capable of achieving positive outcomes for those they work with.
- A more creative, evidence-based, professional and consistent approach to carer recruitment.
- A foster care volunteer workforce that is better supported, better skilled and more capable of achieving positive outcomes for those they work with.
- Carers will be genuine members of a child's care team and actively involved in planning for the child in their care. Their views will be respected and responded to.

Service effectiveness and sustainability Issue 3: Indigenous services**Where we are today**

Aboriginal children, young people and families under-represented in family support services and over-represented in placement services. Many Aboriginal children and young people are losing contact with their culture and communities. Our services must be more responsive and culturally aware.

Why we are here and why we need to change

- Too few Aboriginal organisations which are adequately resourced and supported to deliver the wide range of effective services their community needs.
- Current service models inadequate to meet the needs of the Aboriginal community.
- A long history of inattention to the needs of Aboriginal children, families and communities.

**Where we want to be**

- A stronger Aboriginal service sector, with better equipped service providers.
- More effective service models for effective and earlier work with Aboriginal families to be widely established, ensuring more Aboriginal children remain in the care of their families and/or their local community.

Service effectiveness and sustainability Issue 4: The standing of the sector

Where we are today

Little understanding of the nature and value of the work of this sector within the broader community and an undervaluing of the work within the sector itself.

Why we are here and why we need to change

- An absence of successful strategies to effectively communicate our work
- Media with greater interest in negative than positive stories emanating from this sector.



Where we want to be

- A well developed strategy for effective communication of the work of this sector; utilising internal department expertise and sector-based representatives, which will contribute to a more positive view of our work by the public.

Service effectiveness and sustainability Issue 5: Funding models**Where we are today**

Failure to regularly update and revise funding models to reflect increasing complexity.

Why we are here and why we need to change

- Failure to clearly articulate the components of what funding purchases within family and placement service delivery.
- A lack of appreciation of the infrastructure requirements of CSOs.

**Where we want to be**

- Transparent, clearly articulated method for developing funding models and mechanisms and timing for reviewing these models.
- Clear articulation of respective obligations and responsibilities at statewide or system level and regional level.

4.2 The plan – all organisations

Table 4.2 Action plan – all organisations

Family and placement services sector development plan			
Action plan – all organisations			
Where we want to be	Specific actions	Priority status	Comment and next steps
Strengthening advisory structures and planning			
Formal advisory structures established with clear terms of reference, cross-sector representation and a focus on proactive planning		A	Child Protection and Family Services Advisory Group now established. Terms of reference agreed.
Stronger, adequately resourced regional (and some sub-regional) and statewide networks, focused on achieving better outcomes for clients by strengthening the effectiveness of the entire service system	Establish the advisory structures (especially the Child Protection and Family Services Advisory Group – see section 3) and function as agreed.	A	Recurrent funding has been made available to Department of Human Services regional offices for ongoing employment of regional quality enhancement officers. These staff members are responsible, amongst other tasks, for providing support to regional networks at the regional level \$1.7 million one-off funding to regional out-of-home care services and \$600,000 one-off funding for family services will contribute to a stronger 'regional network' approach to improving the quality of regional family and placement services.
Greater inclusion of community sector in the planning and development of policy initiatives. A clearly articulated understanding of what partnership means.	Child Protection and Family Services Advisory Group to clearly articulate agreed principles for inclusion of the sector in planning and development of policy initiatives – to be built on the existing Partnership Agreement between Department of Human Services and funded health, housing and community sector organisations and the collaboration and consultation principles for the department and the health, housing and community sector	A	Framework will be guided by the existing Partnership Agreement and collaboration and consultation protocols, adapted as agreed by the Child Protection and Family Services Advisory Group. Work to commence 3rd quarter 2006.
Formal structures in place to improve communication and coordination within the Department of Human Services and across government	As part of the Government's response to recommendations of the Premier's to recommendations of the Premier's Children's Advisory Committee, the Children's Services Coordination Board (CSCB – cross departments) and the	A	Formal advice on the purpose and function of the two groups to be provided to service providers, which will include information on the process for identifying issues for consideration by the two groups and processes for feeding back their achievements.

Family and placement services sector development plan

Action plan – all organisations

Where we want to be	Specific actions	Priority status	Comment and next steps
	Child Outcomes Leadership Group (COLG – internal Department of Human Services) have been established. These groups provide formal structures to increase coordination within the department and across government. Greater promotion of the purpose and function of these groups is needed across the sector.		
Commitment to a shared vision and a clear articulation of the roles and responsibilities of the Department of Human Services, peak bodies, regions and individual CSOs in effecting positive change within the sector	Draft statement of roles and responsibilities between the various parties	B	To be referred to the Child Protection and Family Services Advisory Group for consideration – first quarter 2006.
Leaders within community services provided with opportunity to enhance their skills	Develop a 'leadership bank' approach for identified sector leaders aimed at developing leadership skills.	B	Scoping of leadership needs within sector to be a component of the larger workforce development strategy. Consultation with CSOs to occur on including appropriate level CSO staff in management development training to be offered to Department of Human Services CAFW6 staff during 2006.
Rational and effective deployment of agencies to priority communities. Reduction of overlap, fragmentation and diffusion.	Facilitate planning process between multi-region community service organisations to achieve more service-user friendly and less fragmented agency deployment.	A	Multi-region CSOs
Structures in place to support effective partnership between Aboriginal organisations, non-Aboriginal organisations and the Department of Human Services	Consider establishing an Aboriginal peak or lead organisation to lead the establishment of this network and support its continuation.	A	These tasks will be addressed as part of the development of the capacity building strategy for Aboriginal organisations to be developed in consultation with these organisations.
	Establish and support Aboriginal service providers network to ensure effective operation and participation.	B	To be in addition to Aboriginal representation on other advisory structures.

Family and placement services sector development plan

Action plan – all organisations

Where we want to be	Specific actions	Priority status	Comment and next steps
Robust and systemic approaches to ensuring the voices of all clients are heard as services are planned, delivered and evaluated.	Develop, implement and monitor Charter for Children in Care.	A	Work on the Charter is nearing completion. Consultation to occur during 2006 on its implementation and process for monitoring adherence.
	Develop a clear articulation of practice expectations around hearing the voice of children and young people in care, together with materials/publications to support this work.	A	\$300,000 in one-off funding has been allocated to progress this work. A working group made up of CREATE, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, CSOs and regional and Central Department of Human Services staff to be established to guide and inform this work.
Strengthening our focus on outcomes			Strengthening our focus on outcomes
Outcomes and objectives defined, communicated, regularly monitored and reported upon and this information is used by advisory structures to drive service improvements.	Establish and monitor an outcomes framework for Victoria's children via the Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring system.	A	This work is currently being undertaken by the Statewide Outcomes for Children Branch.
	Establish priority populations outcomes framework (Aboriginal children and children in out-of-home care).	A	As part of this, a working group consisting of representatives from the Outcomes Branch, the Child Protection and Family Services Branch, CREATE, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, VACCA and a number of CSOs has been established to guide the development of the survey tool and process for the priority populations.
	Develop measures of service system effectiveness and monitor on an ongoing basis.	A	To be referred to Ministerial Advisory Committee
Strengthening service model effectiveness and quality			
Service models better able to meet the needs of, and achieve positive outcomes for, children, young people and families.	Implement a model of therapeutic foster care	A	Service model has been developed. Selection process to be completed third quarter 2006, with services operational during fourth quarter 2006.
	Strengthen the effectiveness of secure welfare services, in particular assisting transition from secure welfare to community placement	A	Consultation on possible model occurred March 2006 as part of the legislative implementation process. Model to be agreed and operational second half 2006.
	Develop a strategic plan to improve outcomes for children and young people in residential care	A	Working group established in February 2006. Work will be undertaken during 2006. This working group will report to the CP&FSAG as one of its 'issue specific' working groups.

Family and placement services sector development plan

Action plan – all organisations

Where we want to be	Specific actions	Priority status	Comment and next steps
	Establish the 'Hurstbridge Farm' therapeutic care model	A	Model under development – to be operational by second quarter 2007
	Strengthen the clinical capacity and understanding across the Family and Placement Services Sector	B	A strategic approach to strengthen clinical expertise across the range of the sector's programs is to be developed. This will build on our improved understanding in this area flowing from services such as Take Two, and will require the development of stronger links with health and other service providers. CP&FSAG will advise on the development of this approach, and their recommendations will be provided to the Child Outcomes Leadership Group
	Develop a model of leaving care support	A	Working group established and consultation commenced June 2006. Model to be operational by fourth quarter 2006.
	Review approach to permanent care to ensure consistency with the focus on stability within the <i>Children, Youth and Families Act 2005</i>	A	Working group to be established by fourth quarter 2006 to report to CP&FSAG as one of its 'issue-specific' working groups.
	Establish process for agency registration that promotes focus on service quality	A	Working group established first quarter 2006 to advise on this work. To be completed third quarter 2006.
	Provide recurrent funding to the Centre for Excellence to play a lead role in supporting service providers to meet their service requirements and embed a focus on quality improvement.	A	Funding provided commencing second quarter 2006 (to replace non-recurrent funding provided for the previous two years).
	Develop models of care to accommodate children and young people subject to a Therapeutic Treatment (Placement) Order as defined in the <i>Children, Youth and Families Act 2005</i> sections 252–258	B	Models to be developed by Office for Children in consultation with sector and relevant experts.
Service models for effective kinship care support developed and widely implemented	Pilot and evaluate two models of kinship care service delivery in Southern and Eastern regions, to be supported by well articulated	A	Southern Region model is now operational. An evaluation framework has been agreed and established.

Family and placement services sector development plan

Action plan – all organisations

Where we want to be	Specific actions	Priority status	Comment and next steps
	guidelines and standards as necessary		<p>Eastern Region model to be developed in second half 2006 – \$80,000 has been allocated to this initial pilot.</p> <p>Evaluation of both models to be undertaken by Department of Human Services Child Protection and Family Services Branch.</p> <p>Working group for establishment of guidelines and standards as required to be formed in the second quarter 2006 to report to CP&FSAG as one of its 'issue-specific' working groups.</p>
A service system that intervenes earlier and appropriately when problems arise – right across the continuum of service provision – to reduce service penetration and address the impact of harm.	Complete roll out of the Family Support Innovations projects across the state	A	<p>Rollout to continue – to be completed 2008-09</p> <p>Department of Human Services and service providers to consult further on current service model to ensure optimum performance.</p>
	Review Family Services strategic framework	A	Completed by third quarter 2006
	Continue planning and roll out of community-based intakes across the state	A	Ongoing work – funding stream commences third quarter 2006
	Develop an early assessment tool for use with all children and young people entering care to identify needs and services required	B	\$2.05 million allocated for assessment upon entry to care in 2006-07 State Budget. Working group to be established by July 2006 to scope future approach to assessments. This will build upon earlier work undertaken within the Office for Children in consultation with general practitioners and paediatricians.
Strengthening the evidence base			
Greater investment in research to inform policy and practice	Establish the Felton Chair in Child and Family Welfare	A	Chair commenced in position 2nd quarter 2006.
	Fund research assistant position to support the Chair in Child and Family Welfare	A	Research assistant to be appointed third quarter 2006
A culture where effective, innovative practice is encouraged, identified, shared, rewarded and built upon	Establish process for the identification and dissemination of innovative practice within the sector	B	The establishment of the sector development team within the Placement and Support Unit will take on responsibility for formal liaison with

Family and placement services sector development plan

Action plan – all organisations

Where we want to be	Specific actions	Priority status	Comment and next steps
			regional Department of Human Services and CSO staff for the identification of innovative practice.
A paid workforce that is better supported and skilled and more capable of achieving positive outcomes for those they work with	Develop a five-year workforce planning strategy for the sector. As part of this, staff surveys to be undertaken every two (or three) years to track changes in needs and issues	B	Further analysis of the workforce survey and consultation with the workforce to be undertaken to inform the strategy. The Sector Development team within the Placement and Support Unit will take on responsibility for formal liaison with regional Department of Human Services and CSO staff for this work.
A better skilled and supported Aboriginal service workforce	Develop an Aboriginal staff development strategy and, where possible, initiate limited scholarships for further study by Aboriginal staff within the sector or Aboriginal school leavers wishing to undertake work in this area	B	Linked to the Connecting to Communities project and Aboriginal service capacity building strategy, consultation with Aboriginal service providers will inform development of this strategy. \$500,000 one-off funding has been allocated to fund capacity building strategies as part of this project. Expenditure subject to wider consultation with organisations.
Aboriginal organisations able to deliver effective services to their community, resulting in more Aboriginal children being maintained within their family and community	Undertake an Aboriginal service capacity building strategy	A	Office for Children to lead development of this strategy in partnership with Aboriginal community and service providers. Work to be linked to the Connecting to Communities project.
A volunteer workforce that is better supported, better skilled, and more capable of achieving positive outcomes for those they work with.	Develop volunteer workforce strategy that focuses on volunteers across the range of services and explores opportunities for roles other than primary care (within the foster care system)	B	Strategy to be developed as part of the wider workforce strategy. May build on related work commenced by The Centre for Excellence – Families helping Families.
Strengthening foster care			
A foster care volunteer workforce that is better supported and skilled and more capable of achieving positive outcomes for those they work with.	Train CSO staff in the delivery of the common competency-based statewide pre-service training and assessment package for foster care	A	Training to be completed third quarter 2006.
	Develop high quality, enhanced level training materials for foster carers	A	Sector consultation to commence third quarter 2006 on training package. This will build on training package developed as part of the therapeutic foster care model.

Family and placement services sector development plan

Action plan – all organisations

Where we want to be	Specific actions	Priority status	Comment and next steps
	Establish foster carer help line	A	FCAV leading this work. Development underway.
A more creative, evidence-based, professional and consistent approach to carer recruitment.	Develop Aboriginal foster care recruitment strategy	B	Linked to the Connecting to Communities project and Aboriginal service capacity building strategy, consultation with Aboriginal service providers will inform development of this strategy. The relationship between kinship care and foster care within the Aboriginal community must be explored as part of this work.
	Develop a statewide foster care recruitment strategy	B	Will build on work of the existing foster care recruitment network and ensure consistent, high quality promotional material is developed to support recruitment practice across the state. \$500,000 one-off funding provided to support this work.
	Pilot a regional approach to foster care recruitment, assessment and training in order to improve efficiencies and consistencies in this area	B	Will capitalise on the common approach to carer training now developed and the transparent funding model. Negotiations with regional Department of Human Services and CSOs to occur second half 2006 on a possible pilot of this approach within a region or sub-regional area.
Carers will be genuine members of a child's care team and be actively involved in planning for the child in their care. Their views will be respected and responded to.	Through ongoing implementation of the Looking After Children (LAC) framework, re-emphasise the need to ensure all carers are involved in all processes as genuine members of the child's care team	B	Central LAC steering committee to consider strategies to further embed LAC approach to care provision. The \$1.7 million one-off funding provided to regions and CSOs will target this issue.
More effective service models for work with Aboriginal families to be widely established, ensuring more Aboriginal children remain in the care of their families and/or their local community.	Pilot and evaluate a model of kinship care service delivery within the Aboriginal service sector	A	Linked to the Connecting to Communities project and Aboriginal service capacity building strategy. Pilot being developed in Southern Region will inform this work, as will work on the development of a therapeutic foster care model.
	Implement the whole-of-family model of family support with Aboriginal communities	A	Specifications completed. Selection process to be undertaken during 2006.
	Further expand Aboriginal Family Decision Making project as funding allows.	A	To be rolled out subject to ongoing assessment of outcomes and as budget allows.

Family and placement services sector development plan

Action plan – all organisations

Where we want to be	Specific actions	Priority status	Comment and next steps
A stronger Aboriginal service sector, with better equipped service providers.	Undertake an Aboriginal service capacity building strategy	B	Office for Children to lead development of this strategy in partnership with Aboriginal community and service providers. Work to be linked to the Connecting to Communities project. \$500,000 one-off funding has been allocated to fund capacity building strategies as part of this project. Expenditure is subject to wider consultation with organisations.
Strengthening service sustainability			
Transparent, clearly articulated funding models; method for developing and mechanisms and timing for reviewing these models.	Develop and agree upon funding principles for all family and placement services	A	Work currently underway in the funding models and viability working group focuses on home-based care. Upon satisfactory completion of that work, to commence on residential care and family support costings. Work will commence 3rd quarter 2006.
	Implement a new funding model for home-based care services	A	New model implemented third quarter 2006.
Strengthening our profile			
A well developed strategy for effective communication of the work of this sector, utilising internal department expertise and sector-based representatives, which will contribute to a more positive view of our work by the public.	Develop a strategy to be developed for effective communication of the work	B	This is one of the Ministerial Advisory Committee for Child and Family Support's terms of reference. Action to be guided by their advice to the Minister. MAC to consider this issue during 2006-07

4.3 The plan – improving service responses to Aboriginal children, young people and families

As discussed previously, it was always intended that the plan would focus on the ways in which service responses to Aboriginal children, young people and families can be improved. This focus was consistent with the new *Children, Youth and Families Act (2005)*, which also places significant emphasis on the needs of Aboriginal children, young people families and communities.

There has been extensive consultation with Aboriginal communities about the next steps in strengthening Aboriginal services and supports, the results of which are reflected in both the white paper, *Protecting children...the next steps*, and the *Children, Youth and Families Act (2005)*. Work on the plan, therefore, shared this emphasis on the needs of Aboriginal organisations in this sector.

Aboriginal organisations were represented at the four sector-wide consultations on the plan which took place during October 2005. In addition, on 8 February 2006, a consultation was held with representatives of a range of Aboriginal organisations³⁴ on what was, at that stage, the most recent draft of the challenges facing all family and placement service providers (not just Aboriginal) and the list of initial actions which had been identified to address these challenges.

In general, the challenges and actions identified were supported by the representatives at the 8 February meeting. However, the consultation also fleshed out many of the challenges from the viewpoint of the Aboriginal organisations and offered further insight on the actions required to overcome these. Table 4.3 details each of the key challenges listed earlier in section 4.1 and adds a summary of the feedback from the February consultation, together with some possible actions that should be considered.

Table 4.3 Feedback from consultation with Aboriginal service providers – 8 February 2006

Challenges	
Comment	Possible actions
Inadequately defined approach to partnership between government, service providers and service users, which includes an inadequate definition of each party's roles and responsibilities	
There is significant variation in the quality of relationships between the Department of Human Services and Aboriginal organisations across regions.	The Department of Human Services needs to ensure staff approach relationships with Aboriginal service providers in a more consistently respectful and culturally sensitive way.
Relationships hinge significantly on the level of respect towards Aboriginal organisations and communities – which is sometimes lacking.	Existing memoranda of understanding need to be adhered to, and those under development need to be completed.
Participants questioned the possibility of ever achieving true partnership with the Department of Human Services – preferring the term 'collaboration'.	
Inadequate service coordination and leadership at the regional and statewide levels	
A sense that service providers are not well enough informed of activity within the sector, including opportunities for training, learning from each other about best practice etc.	General support for the establishment of a peak or lead organisation that is able to support networks amongst Aboriginal organisations; play a role in policy development; ensure organisations can learn off each other without 'reinventing the wheel' all the time; ensure Aboriginal organisations are aware of current issues and also of resources that may be available to organisations. Some tensions around the division of 'lead' and 'service delivery' functions exists and would need to be addressed.
Great need for staff to undertake more professional development	Strong support for more joint training between organisations and the Department of Human Services. This provides a real opportunity for staff to receive high quality training and to build relationships to improve practice in future. Training on program development also required.

Challenges	
Comment	Possible actions
A reactive service system, driven by system, organisational and external pressures rather than by a focus on achieving improved outcomes for children, young people and families and acting in a way that is informed by research and best practice	
There is a need to listen more closely to what Aboriginal communities and service providers say their communities need.	A peak or lead agency could facilitate a clearer understanding of community and organisational views.
At the regional level we need to be sure that planning is consistent and reflects work undertaken across the state.	Each region must have a regional action plan for Indigenous family and placement services providers that is consistent with other work, such as the Aboriginal Services Plan.
Service models which have not kept pace with the changing nature and rising complexity of the children, young people and families the services are for, and which need to ensure a stronger focus on earlier intervention	
Kinship care is central to the provision of out-of-home care for Aboriginal children. Kinship carers must be supported.	Trial of a kinship care model strongly supported
Further expansion of family support needed, with ability extend level and duration of support	Ongoing implementation of Family Support Innovations Projects supported
A declining volunteer workforce within out-of-home care and a need to better harness and support the potential volunteer resource that exists in other parts of the service system	
Again, kinship carers are central to this issue. They must be supported better.	Trial of a kinship care model strongly supported
Inadequate caregiver reimbursement a hurdle to identifying new carers	Consideration given to increased reimbursements for carers of Aboriginal children
Aboriginal children, young people and families under-represented in family support services and over-represented in placement services. Many Aboriginal children and young people are losing contact with their culture and communities. Our services must be more responsive and culturally aware.	
The absence of funding for services to adolescents in placement and support is contributing to the high level of Aboriginal young people cared for by non-Aboriginal organisations	Services for the adolescent out-of-home care population must be established with organisations – this will raise training and program development issues
Failure to regularly update and revise funding models to reflect increasing complexity	
Aboriginal out-of-home care CSOs receive only general level funding across all activities. There is a need for higher levels that recognise the complexity of work within the Aboriginal community.	Funding levels to Aboriginal organisations need to be reviewed. Consideration to be given to increased funding on the basis of the disadvantage facing many Aboriginal communities.

Building on this and previous feedback, Table 4.4 details the Aboriginal-specific action plan for the family and placement services sector development plan. All of the actions listed are targeted at improving service responsiveness to Aboriginal children, young people and families.

Aboriginal service capacity building strategy

As detailed in Table 4.4, the first action in the area of strengthening Aboriginal service responsiveness is the development of an Aboriginal service capacity building strategy. This action is, in reality, the vehicle through which the majority of all action in this area will be undertaken. Subject to further consultation with the Aboriginal community, it is intended to:

- Establish an Office for Children Aboriginal Advisory Committee to review and advise on operational policy and service development and implementation issues. This Advisory Committee will help to streamline consultations with Aboriginal communities and community-controlled organisations.
- Develop a whole of Office for Children Plan for Aboriginal children, young people and families.
- Consolidate Aboriginal programs for children and families within a single work unit, reporting to the Executive Director, Office for Children.
- Develop strategies to increase community access to information about services and supports in their local area and promote community understanding of the Child Protection Service.

Future program development will aim to:

- Ensure that all Office for Children programs and services are culturally inclusive
- Enable Aboriginal children and families to better engage in existing universal and mainstream services
- Provide targeted and specialist support where necessary; and
- Support Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to develop the organisational capacity to take the lead in service provision where appropriate

This new Aboriginal unit will also take responsibility for working with Aboriginal organisations to build their service capacity. Capacity building work will involve:

- Mapping Aboriginal child and family services across Victoria, including the range of programs and type of agency that is delivering those programs in each Aboriginal community
- Examining the role of local Aboriginal services and mainstream services in facilitating access to early childhood, family services and placement services across Victoria and identify opportunities for improvement
- Identify opportunities to maximise existing investment in Aboriginal program
- Develop an action plan for building high quality and viable Aboriginal child and family services
- This action plan will spell out actions to strengthen governance, management and service delivery within agencies, increase the supply of trained Aboriginal workers and better connect Aboriginal services to broader health, education and early childhood services at a local level. It will provide a clear road map for implementing provisions of the *Children, Youth and Families Act (2005)*, which enable the Secretary of the Department of Human Services to transfer management of court orders to an Aboriginal head of an Aboriginal agency.

One consideration for the project is whether a lead child and family Aboriginal service should be established to facilitate community and agency capacity building.

Table 4.4 Action plan – Aboriginal organisations

Family and placement services sector development plan			
Action plan – Aboriginal organisations			
Where we want to be	Specific actions	Priority status	Comment and next steps
Strengthening Aboriginal service effectiveness and sustainability			
Aboriginal organisations able to deliver effective services to their community, resulting in more Aboriginal children being maintained within their family and community. A stronger Aboriginal service sector, with better equipped service providers.	Undertake an Aboriginal service capacity building strategy	A	Office for Children to lead development of this strategy in partnership with Aboriginal community and service providers. Work to be linked to the Connecting to Communities project. \$500,000 one-off funding allocated to fund capacity building strategies as part of this project. Expenditure subject to wider consultation with organisations.
Strengthening advisory structures and planning			
Structures in place to support effective partnership between Aboriginal organisations, non-Aboriginal organisations and the Department of Human Services	Establish an Office for Children Aboriginal Advisory committee Consider the establishment of an Aboriginal lead organisation to support ongoing service development and ongoing capacity building	A	These tasks will be addressed as part of the development of the capacity building strategy for Aboriginal organisations to be developed in consultation with these organisations.
Strengthening the workforce			
A better skilled and supported Aboriginal service workforce.	Develop an Aboriginal staff development strategy and, where possible, initiate limited scholarships for further study by Aboriginal staff within the sector or Aboriginal school leavers wishing to undertake work in this area.	B	Linked to the Connecting to Communities project and Aboriginal service capacity building strategy, consultation with Aboriginal service providers will inform development of this strategy. \$500,000 one-off funding has been allocated to fund capacity building strategies as part of this project. Expenditure subject to wider consultation with organisations.
Strengthening service models			
Improved policy and service development across child and family services which is informed by advice provided by the Office for Children Aboriginal Advisory Committee.	Pilot and evaluate a model of kinship care service delivery within the Aboriginal service sector	A	Linked to the Connecting to Communities project and Aboriginal service capacity building strategy. Pilot being developed in Southern Region will inform this work as will work on the development of a therapeutic care model. The relationship between kinship care and foster care within the Aboriginal community must be explored as part of this work.

Family and placement services sector development plan

Action plan – all organisations

Where we want to be	Specific actions	Priority status	Comment and next steps
	Implement the whole-of-family model of family support with Aboriginal communities	A	Specifications completed. Selection process to be undertaken during 2006.
	Further expand Aboriginal Family Decision Making project as funding allows.	A	To be rolled out subject to ongoing assessment of outcomes and as budget allows.
Strengthening our focus on outcomes			
Outcomes and objectives defined, communicated, regularly monitored and reported upon in order to drive service improvements.	Develop an Office for Children plan for Aboriginal children	A	This work is currently being undertaken by the Statewide Outcomes for Children Branch. As part of this, a working group consisting of representatives from the Outcomes Branch, the Child Protection and Family Services Branch, CREATE, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, VACCA and a number of CSOs has been established to guide the development of the survey tool and process for the priority populations.
	Establish and monitor an outcomes framework for Victoria's children via the Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring system		
	Establish priority populations outcomes framework (Aboriginal children and children in out-of-home care)		
Strengthening foster care			
A more creative, evidence based, professional and consistent approach to carer recruitment	Develop Aboriginal foster care recruitment strategy	B	Linked to the Connecting to Communities project and Aboriginal service capacity building strategy, consultation with Aboriginal service providers will inform development of this strategy. As part of this, consideration to be given to enhancing reimbursements to carers supported by Aboriginal organisations.

Attachment 1 Summary of key findings of Background paper 1: Victorian families, children and their carers

*Victorian families, children and their carers*³⁵ provided a possible picture of Victoria in 2016, some key features of which are detailed below:

- **Demand:** on an unchanged policy basis, demand for family and placement services is likely to increase by about 22 per cent by 2015–16.
- **Population:** while the number of children and young people aged 0 to 17 years is likely to fall slightly over the forecast period, the distribution of children and young people geographically is likely to change significantly. There will be growth in only a handful of Victoria's 78 municipalities, mostly in the growth corridors of Melbourne to the west and south-east, the Greater Geelong area, the Hume freeway corridor and the Riverland area. In large parts of the non-metropolitan area, the dryland farming areas in particular, the number of children will fall significantly; by more than 40 per cent in some municipalities.
- **Families:** the number of conventional couple families with children will remain approximately constant, but the number of single parent families and adults living alone will probably increase significantly. The average number of children in all types of family will probably fall, reflecting long-term social changes in Australia as in almost all Western countries.
- **Complexity:** Department of Human Services data identifies a number of important familial characteristics within the family and placement services client population. These include factors such as substance abuse, mental health problems, low income, family violence, family structure and intellectual disability. All of these factors are much more common in the population involved in family and placement services than they are in the general community. Demand for family and placement services will rise as the prevalence of these factors rises.
- **Aboriginality:** Aboriginal children are significantly over-represented in the family and placement services sector, in part due to the multiple social, economic and educational disadvantages suffered by Aboriginal families. The needs of Aboriginal communities pose challenges for the future provision of family and placement services.
- **Workforce:** volunteer families provide foster care, kinship care and permanent care for more than 3,000 children and young people at any one time. On current trends, it will become increasingly difficult to sustain foster care as a major element of family and placement services on an unchanged policy basis. While kinship care is the preferred alternative to foster care, the long-term sustainability of kinship care is difficult to predict. The likely continued growth in kinship care demands attention to the ways in which kinship carers might be better assessed and supported in the future.

These findings lead to the following summary of the current context our sector is in:

- rising demand in numbers and complexity
- increasing pressure on existing ways of working and service models to adapt to meet these demands
- demand potentially unevenly spread across regions
- continued challenges presented by the growth in the number of Aboriginal children, underscoring the necessity of responding better to the needs of the Aboriginal community
- a concurrent drop in a major workforce resource – foster carers.

This context is reflected in the characteristics that must be developed within our sector to meet current challenges. This is one of the main areas for discussion in Section 2.

Attachment 2 Summary of key findings of Background paper 3: *The findings of the survey of paid employees*

A major piece of work that contributes to our understanding of the current context for the family and placement services sector is the survey of staff undertaken as part of the workforce working group. The findings of this survey are the subject of Background paper 3. The initial work we did through the survey (which was the first of its kind) raised many questions and has provided a starting point for commencing work on a workforce development strategy.

In general, looking at the whole population, the respondents seemed happy and stable (with a median length of employment with the current employer as three years, and within the sector as six years). It is clear that from this initial data analysis that that the workforce enjoys and is committed to their work and sees themselves continuing to work in this sector.

Several concerns were noted by the respondents, in particular, that there were no career opportunities available to them in their current workplace (46 per cent); that they did not feel safe from physical assault from clients (26 per cent); and that, for about 80 per cent of respondents, time commitment and financial cost (respectively) were a barrier to further study.

When this data is broken down into the employment sub-groups, it is clear that some variations exist across the four groups examined. There is evidence of:

- a higher proportion of male staff within the residential care sector
- a slightly more stable work group amongst managers within residential care
- a more evenly spread age distribution amongst family services staff than the other groups
- lower levels of qualification in residential care, and a higher level of qualification amongst family services staff than home-based care/placement and support staff
- fewer opportunities for learning and development for residential care direct care staff – who are the group who need such opportunities the most;
- Many more staff in residential care do not feel safe from the threat of assault from clients (53 per cent).

The sub-group analysis also identifies many areas where results are very similar, if not identical, across the four sub-groups – some positive and some not so – including:

- high proportions – mid to high 90 per cent – who like the work they do
- high proportions who work in this sector because they wanted to work with children, youth and families
- a relative lack of perceived career opportunities in the current workplace
- high interest across the four groups in furthering careers within the sector

- a high percentage who see a future in the sector for themselves and similar percentages who intend to be working in the organisation or sector in a year's time; and
- 16–23 per cent looking for work outside the sector.

More analysis of this data is provided in Background paper 3 and this snapshot clearly raises issues that the future workforce strategy must consider in more detail. These include the ageing workforce, how to attract and retain younger people, the issue of salary parity with the health and public sectors, and limitations in career structures within current Awards.

Some of the other major findings of the report include:

Demographic information

- 81 per cent of the workforce is women.
- 2 per cent of survey respondents identified as Aboriginal.
- 79 per cent of respondents were born in Australia, 7 per cent in England, 3 per cent in New Zealand and 11 per cent were born elsewhere.
- Only 2 per cent (23) identified as using a second or third language in client encounters.

Employment information

- 39 per cent of the workforce was employed on a part-time basis.
- 20 per cent of male respondents and 39 per cent of female respondents worked part-time.
- 41 per cent of respondents identified their primary program area/primary role in family services, 27 per cent residential care, 24 per cent foster care, 20 per cent case management, 3 per cent permanent care, 3 per cent kinship care and 3 per cent lead tenant.
- Respondents identified the nature of their role as social work/case work (49 per cent); supervision/management (24 per cent); residential care worker (19 per cent); formal case management (12 per cent); in home support (10 per cent); and education and support (7 per cent).
- Approximately 83 per cent of employees are employed under the Social and Community Services Award.
- The median length of tenure in the sector is six years, while the average length of tenure with the current employer is three years.
- 78 per cent of respondents have worked in other sectors prior to working in this sector.

Education and training

- 55 per cent of respondents had completed a TAFE Certificate or Diploma.
- 44 per cent of respondents had completed an undergraduate degree.
- 30 per cent of respondents had completed a postgraduate qualification.
- 26 per cent of respondents were currently completing further tertiary or vocational education which related to their job role.
- 80 per cent of people were interested in undertaking further study, and 80 per cent identified the major barriers to undertaking further study were the financial cost and time commitment.
- 93 per cent of respondents received supervision, 67 per cent received it fortnightly and 23 per cent monthly.
- 13 per cent of respondents did not participate in any training courses in the past 12 months, the remainder of respondents, 77 per cent, had participated in an average of three training courses.
- 98 per cent of respondents believed they would benefit from further work-related training.
- The training areas with participation by more than 50 per cent of respondents were conflict resolution/mediation; attachment; complex/difficult behaviour; first aid; Looking After Children; privacy/confidentiality.

Job satisfaction

- 96 per cent of respondents like the work they do.
- 46 per cent of respondents thought there were no career opportunities available to them in their current workplace.
- 98 per cent of respondents agreed they liked the people they work with.

Future aspirations

- 87 per cent saw a future for themselves in the sector.
- 82 per cent of respondents plan to be working in the same organisation in one year's time and 88 per cent in the sector.
- For those considering leaving the sector, salary was the most commonly cited reason.

Variation across sub-sectors

Background paper 3 will contain some detail on the difference in results between the sub-groups of employees surveyed. Some of the key differences are also highlighted in the table below. For the purpose of this analysis, the sub-groups we have examined are home-based care and placement support staff; family services staff; residential care – direct care staff; and residential care – office-based/supervisory staff. It should be noted that some respondents identified themselves as working in more than one of these sub-group areas.

Table A2.1 Workforce sub-group data

Issue	Home-based care and placement and support	Family Services	Residential care – direct care	Residential care – supervisory	
Gender					
Male	13%	13%	39%	27%	
Female	85%	86%	61%	73%	
Age					
20–24	7%	3%	10%	0%	
25–29	25%	10%	14%	11%	
30–34	14%	15%	14%	23%	
35–39	9%	14%	9%	7%	
40–44	11%	14%	8%	14%	
45–49	16%	17%	19%	19%	
50–55	9%	14%	13%	13%	
55–59	6%	9%	5%	8%	
60 plus	1%	3%	3%	4%	
Tenure in sector (years)	5	6	3	8	
Tenure with employer (years)	3	3	3	4	
Qualifications/Education/Training					
Secondary highest	5%	3%	24%	13%	
TAFE Certificate	28%	23%	53%	38%	
Diploma/Advanced Diploma	29%	36%	25%	31%	
Undergraduate degree	57%	58%	12%	36%	
Postgraduate Certificate/Diploma	15%	25%	5%	22%	
Postgraduate degree	17%	18%	4%	11%	
Masters degree	5%	9%	2%	4%	
PhD	1%	1%	0%	0%	
Currently undertaking tertiary or vocational education – job related	23%	25%	32%	32%	
I am offered learning and development opportunities	85%	84%	75%	89%	
There needs to be more on the job training	72%	66%	80%	68%	
Job satisfaction					
I like the work I do	95%	98%	96%	97%	
I entered the sector because I wanted to work with children, young people and families	94%	94%	95%	96%	90%

Table A2.1 Workforce sub-group data (continued)

Issue	Home-based care and placement and support	Family Services	Residential care – direct care	Residential care – supervisory
Job satisfaction (continued)				
My immediate supervisor gives me valuable feedback	80%	85%	76%	74%
I am usually able to keep up with my workload	71%	79%	96%	75%
I receive recognition for a job well done	81%	84%	80%	80%
Career opportunities are available for me in my current workplace	51%	53%	59%	56%
I am interested in furthering my career in the sector	85%	85%	83%	85%
I would recommend a career in this sector to others	79%	85%	77%	79%
I see a future for myself in the sector	86%	92%	84%	90%
I feel safe from physical assault from clients	78%	83%	47%	66%
Work intentions				
I plan to be working in this organisation in a year's time	78%	78%	84%	88%
I plan to be working in this sector in a year's time	87%	85%	89%	87%
I am looking for work outside the organisation but within the sector	24%	21%	21%	22%
I am looking for work outside the sector	21%	16%	17%	23%
Reason for looking for work outside the sector				
Salary	75%	48%	71%	71%
Don't enjoy the area	15%	3%	21%	21%
Career development	41%	35%	58%	58%
Conditions of employment	32%	15%	55%	55%

Summary

In general, looking at the whole population, the respondents seemed happy and stable (with a median length of employment with the current employer as three years, and within the sector as six years). It is clear that from this initial data analysis that members of the workforce likes their work and sees themselves continuing to work in this sector. However, they do not think they have opportunities to advance their careers.

Several concerns were noted by the respondents, in particular, that there were no career opportunities available to them in their current workplace (46 per cent); that they did not feel safe from physical assault from clients (26 per cent); and that for about 80 per cent of respondents, time commitment and financial cost (respectively) were a barrier to further study.

Attachment 3 Key themes and recommendations arising from the CREATE consultation with children and young people with a care experience

Key themes

1. Need to increase training of carers and workers

'I don't trust workers until they prove to me that they will advocate for me in tough situations.'

Ongoing training of carers and workers, being well informed and updated in relation to new developments were highlighted as essential areas to focus within the sector.

Participants stated that workers and carers should be trained in the following:

- communication
- mediation
- sector development
- advocating for clients
- young people's rights
- first aid
- nutrition
- monitoring
- caring and empathy
- rights
- health monitoring
- health and wellbeing clients
- system and processes
- initiatives such as the Partnering Agreement
- basic parenting skills
- youth/child participation.

2. Need to recruit carers and staff with youth friendly characteristics and match carers/staff to children and young people more effectively

'It is hard when you move into a new house and there are all these rules that you don't understand, the workers at my unit worked with me to make the rules that they had more flexible and realistic for me.'

'Our carers need to have a break from us every couple of months, it makes it much better when we come together again.'

The young people fed back passionately about the negative experiences they have had with workers while in care. When asked the qualities of a good worker the responses were similar and revolved around being listened to as young people and having the needs of their birth parent/s and siblings acknowledged (when appropriate) during the involvement with Child Protection, not excluding before entering care and when exiting care.

Qualities such as being kind, nice, trusting, honest, reliable, consistent, understanding and flexible are themes that the young people viewed as being important when working in the out-of-home care sector with children and young people. The young people also said that all workers and carers should have experience working with children and young people and/or may have raised their own children.

Participants strongly fed back that there should be better matching of worker/carers and young people to ensure more stable and sustainable placements. It was highlighted that respite contingencies for workers/carers and young people should be increased and more readily available.

3. Lack of opportunities for the voice of children and young people to play an active part in decision making and for them to connect with each other within the sector

‘Listening and respecting us helps us to feel empowered to make decisions about our lives.’

‘Listening to us gives us confidence in you—that you will help us.’

During the consultation, participants strongly fed back that there are not enough opportunities available for the voices of children and young people to be heard. They felt that young people become accustomed to situations that they are not fully comfortable with because they do not know the avenues to create change both within their lives and the larger system.

Participants acknowledged that there are more opportunities for them to be involved in system change both within their organisations and with the Department of Human Services, but they would like to be involved in every area that involves making decisions about children and young people’s lives in the broader scheme.

Through the consultations, it became obvious that young people felt disempowered through not being able to socialise and meet with other young people who are in out-

of-home care. It could be said that creating opportunities for young people to come together helps them learn about other young people in out-of-home care and creates opportunities for participation and to have a voice.

Participants stated that when they have concerns about their placements they speak to their workers. It was consistently fed back that workers do not listen and, after a time of trying, the young people learn to live with the concerns they have because they do not know how to promote change in any other way.

4. Lack of education for children and young people about the care sector and services available to them

‘If I have the rights to have my say then how come my workers don’t ask me what I want?’

‘So I can have my say without my worker knowing what I’ve said?’

The participants saw the sector as a structure that did not take into account the different needs of children, young people and families. They also remarked that the services that were funded within the sector were not familiar to them and they did not know how to access them.

The participants felt that the sector needed to be more fluid and that there should be more focus on being able to access support for families before it became necessary for children and young people to enter out-of-home care.

The young people think that participating in consultations is a great opportunity for them to learn about their rights within the sector and avenues to access services through talking with other young people who have had experiences within the sector.

Participants felt that by educating children and young people in care in relation to services and programs that are available to them, they will be empowered to make choices about their future, and link in with community support networks that can continue past their care experience.

Participants felt that they knew little about the sector that cares for them and felt that by having a better understanding of the structure, initiatives and departments they would be able to make more educated and informed decisions about their lives.

5. Level of children and young people's knowledge and link with their community needs is low and needs to be developed

'I play soccer and it has helped me meet other young people that don't single me out as being in out-of-home care.'

'How can I do things like sports or be in school when I keep getting moved to different placements.'

The young people who participated in the consultations were not aware of services that existed in their community, outside of the care sector, for example, sporting clubs. Participants could not identify support networks, such as schools or other community programs or services. Participants could only identify care services and programs as 'their community'. They explained in depth that their world is made up of out-of-home care services and the need to become involved in the outside community did not arise.

The need for communities to be developed around young people who are in out-of-home care is essential for young people to be able to function in society, especially when they are transitioning into independent living.

Communities need to be educated and engaged in relation to supporting children and young people in out-of-home care.

It was highlighted by participants that when opportunities to participate in school camps, excursions and activities outside of school arise, it is important to have better, timelier responses so that the young people do not miss out and are not made to feel like they are different.

6. Lack of healthy and nutritious eating environments within the care setting.

'Workers in resi units should teach us how to cook healthy meals because it helps us when we are moving into independent living and teaches us the importance of looking after ourselves.'

The young people who participated in the consultations stated that they need to be better educated around leading a healthy and nutritious lifestyle and for this to happen they felt that carers and workers needed to be trained around healthy choices.

It was stated consistently that many carers and workers are unaware of healthy lifestyle options and therefore do not have the skills to be able to pass this onto the children and young people they care for.

Healthy alternatives need to be available and practised in the daily lifestyles of the young people. This will assist with equipping them with the knowledge and skills around maintaining a healthy lifestyle now and while transitioning into independent living.

Recommendations

1. Increase training provisions for carers and workers. It is essential for the care of children and young people that direct care service providers are provided with ongoing capacity to educate carers and workers in relation to areas such as communication, youth participation, children's rights, system processes and nutrition. This enables children and young people to be more empowered to create change within their own lives, and the lives of children and young people in out-of-home care and the wider community.
2. Recruit carers and staff who have youth-friendly characteristics. Ensure this is done by including young people with a care experience in the interview/recruitment process. Increase focus on building relationships between children and young people and key workers/carers and implement practices that match children and young people to carers and workers.
3. Increase the focus on creating opportunities for the voices of children and young people to play an active role in decision making within their lives and the care sector. Ensure these opportunities enable the children and young people to connect with each other.
4. Focus on providing staff/carers with resources and skills that enable them to provide a nutritious and healthy environment, so that children and young people are living healthier and learning essential skills for when they exit care. Incorporate into the care environment skills that are regularly taught by parents, such as team work and working together as a 'family', so that young people are empowered to make decisions about their lifestyles.

5. Provide children and young people in care with training/education in relation to their rights, choices and the care sector.

6. Develop more community-based programs and services that focus on linking children and young people into their community, for example, recreational activities and educational institutions, youth groups etc. that are currently not linked to children and young people in care. Not only will this support children and young people's integration into their community, it will assist in young people's transition into independent living

Attachment 4 Steering committee and working group membership

Steering committee

Name	Organisation
Lisa Neville MLA Co-Chair	Member for Bellarine, State Government of Victoria
Paul Linossier, Co-Chair	CEO, MacKillop Family Services
Aileen Ashford	CEO, Bethany Community Support Inc.
Christina Asquini	Director, Child Protection and Family Services
Muriel Bamblett	CEO, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
Margaret Banks	CEO, Camcare Inc
Coleen Clare	CEO, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare
David Clements	Manager, Placement and Support, Department of Human Services
Doug Dalton	CEO, Connections
Alan Hall	Director, Program and Sector Support, Department of Human Services
Stuart Lindner	Protection, Support and Juvenile Justice Manager, Eastern Region, Department of Human Services
Mick Naughton	Manager, Family Services, Department of Human Services
Sandie de Wolf	CEO, Berry Street Victoria
Kevin Zibell	CEO, Child and Family Services Ballarat

Scenario Planning Working Group

Name	Organisation
Doug Dalton (convenor)	Uniting Care Connections Inc
Aileen Ashford	Bethany Community Support
Coleen Clare	Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare
Nigel Brand	Program and Sector Support, Department of Human Services
Alan Hall	Program and Sector Support, Department of Human Services
David Clements	Placement and Support, Department of Human Services
Jennifer McConachy	Placement and Support, Department of Human Services

Workforce Working Group

Name	Organisation
Sandie de Wolf (convenor)	Berry Street Victoria
Robert Martin	Salvation Army Peninsula Family Services
Di Noyce	Lisa Lodge
Kimberley Flanagan	Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare
Brian Spencer	Community Services and Health Industry Training Board
Connie Salamone	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
David Gorrie	Anglicare Victoria
Maureen McCarty	Service and Workforce Planning, Department of Human Services
Anne Fuller-Jackson	Service and Workforce Planning, Department of Human Services
Matthew Griggspall	Service and Workforce Planning, Department of Human Services
David Clements	Placement and Support, Department of Human Services
Jennifer McConachy	Placement and Support, Department of Human Services

Physical and Systems Infrastructure Working Group

Name	Organisation
Kevin Zibell (convenor)	Child and Family Services Ballarat
Celia Clapp	Connections
Sandy Milne	Salvation Army Peninsula Family Services
Alison Cavanagh	Placement and Support, Department of Human Services
David Clements	Placement and Support, Department of Human Services
Jennifer McConachy	Placement and Support, Department of Human Services

Systems Governance and Performance Monitoring Working Group

Name	Organisation
Paul Linossier (convenor)	MacKillop Family Services
Jane Broadhead	Connections
Caitlin Telford	CREATE Foundation
Cheryl Baxter	Salvation Army Eastcare
David Clements	Placement and Support, Department of Human Services
Jennifer McConachy	Placement and Support, Department of Human Services

Funding Models and Viability Working Group

Name	Organisation
Sandie de Wolf (convenor)	Berry Street Victoria
Kimberley Flanagan	Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare
Graham Boal	MacKillop Family Services
Anita Pell	Berry Street Victoria
Clint Wardle	St Lukes
John Gates	Oz Child
Con Tsingas	Anglicare Victoria
Peter Mullholland	Salvation Army, Westcare

Funding Models and Viability Working Group (continued)

Name	Organisation
Bryan Crebbin	Placement and Support, Department of Human Services
Alan Hall	Program and Sector Support Department of Human Services
Tony Ceddia	Program and Sector Support Department of Human Services
Alison Hayes	Program and Sector Support Department of Human Services
Argiri Alisandratos	North and West Region, Department of Human Services
Helen Brain	Placement and Support Department of Human Services
David Clements	Placement and Support Department of Human Services
Jennifer McConachy	Placement and Support Department of Human Services

Attachment 5 Priority actions relevant to Aboriginal organisations

(as detailed on pages 58–60 of *Protecting children...the next steps*)

Action 7.5

The Department of Human Services will better support Aboriginal families through in-home support for new mothers, four new Aboriginal Best Start projects, and an Aboriginal family restoration program.

Action 7.6

The Children's Bill will require Child Protection and community services to comply with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle. The Children's Bill will also require Child Protection to demonstrate compliance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle before the Children's Court can make a permanent care order.

Action 7.7

The Department of Human Services will implement the new Connecting to Care program, which will involve working with Aboriginal communities and mainstream out-of-home care services to transfer the management of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care placements to community-controlled organisations.

Action 7.8

Recruitment of Aboriginal carers, particularly kinship carers, will be aided by the Department of Human Services taking action to improve training and support to Aboriginal carers.

Action 7.9

The Department of Human Services will work with Aboriginal communities to develop culturally appropriate models for stability planning and out-of-home care.

Action 7.10

The Children's Bill enables the Secretary of the Department of Human Services to authorise heads of approved Aboriginal organisations to assume responsibility for managing Children's Court protection orders relating to an Aboriginal child or young person. Approval would be granted on a case-by-case basis.

Attachment 6 Participants of consultation with Aboriginal organisations (8 February 2006)

Patsy Doolan	Mildura Aboriginal Corporation
Sally Stewart	Mildura Aboriginal Corporation
Rhonda McInnes	Mildura Aboriginal Corporation
Alma Cupper	Murray Valley Aboriginal Corporation
Alyson Ferguson	Gippsland & East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative Limited
Roger McIvor	Gippsland & East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative Limited
Karin McMillan	Mungabareena
Leatisha Morris	Ramahyuck
Megan Collins	Ramahyuck
Renai Dean	Rumbalara Family Services
Deidre King	Aborigines Advancement League
Muriel Bamblett	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
Peter Lewis	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency

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