

CARER ADVISORY GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE As at October 2024

Background

The NSW Out of Home Care (OOHC) Standards are used by the Office of the Children's Guardian for the accreditation and quality improvement of OOHC services in NSW. The standards include that authorised carers should be given the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes and development opportunities and give feedback on how OOHC services are provided.

Carer Advisory Groups contribute to our documentation of a quarterly advocacy report which will be provided to DCJ and the Minister. From time to time we may run an annual online forum with an invitation to the Minister and all CAG members.

The Carer Advisory Group (CAG) provides a collaborative and interagency setting for carers to work alongside OOHC staff from both non-government agencies and Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) to participate and contribute to the service system. My Forever Family NSW will support this process through information sharing, collation of issues and trends across the state and engaging with DCJ to bring about practice and policy change. CAGs enable a more localised approach to participation and help inform decision-making and improvements to foster, relative and kinship care in NSW.

Carer Advisory Groups embed carer participation into DCJ district clusters so carers' voices may be heard and contribute to building a stronger OOHC system in NSW.

Goals

- establish a platform whereby carers, non-government agencies and DCJ can work together to strengthen foster and relative/kinship care services – with a focus on carer support, retention, peer support, training and recruitment.
- provide a localised setting for carers, carer representatives, agencies and DCJ to work together to identify issues and opportunities to achieve better outcomes for children and young people in care.
- encourage identification of systemic issues that impact on the experience of carers and the children they care for.
- inform and support the work of My Forever Family NSW to recruit, support and train foster carers across NSW.

Objectives

Carer Advisory Groups benefit local children and young people in care, their families and carers and the local delivery of the permanency support program, including OOHC services by:

- authorised carers, carer representatives, agencies and DCJ working together to improve services in the district/area by increasing carers' participation in service delivery issues.

- providing a forum for authorised carers to offer feedback and raise issues on policies, protocols, service models and other issues – enabling the carers’ perspective to inform local planning and service delivery and to also inform the statewide agenda.
- improving carer support, recruitment and retention and complaints management by identifying issues and solutions and examples of best practice.
- working constructively to promote a culture of continuous improvement in carer support and retention to benefit the delivery of OOHC in NSW.
- highlighting matters referred by peer support groups or other carer groups where appropriate, particularly issues or topics that may have a broader (e.g. state-wide) aspect or learning (e.g. improving systems or practices).

Reporting – how CAGs views are heard

My Forever Family NSW supports local groups and advocates on behalf of the CAGs with PSP providers, DCJ, and the OCG. Through its quarterly meetings, systemic issues and solutions are identified in a collaborative and constructive way with DCJ, non-government organisations and carers, for local or statewide consideration.

My Forever Family NSW may talk to systemic issues at interagency forums, or at meetings with DCJ or the OCG. DCJ representatives also attend CRG meetings, hearing first-hand issues affecting carers in their caring role and options for improvement.

My Forever Family NSW manages the feedback loop for carer issues that are raised, with local issues monitored and referred back to the district with the goal of resolution. MFF ensures systemic issues raised at forums are (followed up/ formally fed back into DCJ and NGO executives at the local and state levels. This feedback enables DCJ Head Office to consider and represent issues internally within the Department, to interagency forums and in briefings to the Secretary or to the Minister.

Membership

Membership is to reflect the diversity of carers and carer types within each area of NSW and will align with current DCJ district clusters, with consideration for the size and capacity of the group and the constraints of operating effectively. Composition will include carers, carer representatives, agency and DCJ representatives.

- Authorised carers are welcome to apply to their respective CAG via the application form
- MFF will nominate 2-4 carers from each CAG to be carer representatives for that CAG
- Carer representatives will have the opportunity to be the voice of the collective group and may be asked to represent the CAG in other forums or provide advice.

Membership must adhere to the following:

- be broadly representative of carers from the area/district or community
- comprise authorised carers and carer representative/s (e.g. from a carer organisation)
- non-government agency representatives and government representatives
- be selected through a process that supports diversity and is transparent
- serve up to 12 month terms in line with financial year for Carer Representatives, with new carer members

My Forever Family NSW

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(upon proof of authorisation) open at all times for ongoing involvement unless advised otherwise. Carer applications will be open in May and appointed for a July start.

- all involved will be expected to adhere to a respectful code of conduct to remain involved
- if unavailable for a meeting, agency staff members have responsibility to allocate another staff member to attend and advise the My Forever Family NSW representative at least 24 hours prior if they are unable to attend the meeting.
- where required replace a member through a localised, transparent process which may be initiated to seek new membership.

Application Process and Conflict of Interest:

Carers will be required to fill out an application form in order to join to CAG. As part of the application, carers must identify if they also have dual roles working in the sector including what their role is and the agency/organisation they work for. Carers will be asked to submit a brief statement outlining strategies they will use to ensure professionalism and transparency while a member of the CAG.

My Forever Family has the authority to refuse applications if the carer's role with another organisation is thought to be a conflict of interest to the operation of the CAG.

Carer Advisory Group areas

The CAG's utilise current DCJ district clusters to ensure alignment with carers and their agencies. The CAG composition is outlined in the table below:

Carer Advisory Group Name	DCJ Districts
Sydney	Western Sydney & Nepean/ Blue Mountains
	Sydney, South Eastern Sydney & Northern Sydney
	South Western Sydney
Hunter	Hunter & Central Coast
Southern	Illawarra Shoalhaven & Southern NSW
Northern	Mid North Coast, Northern NSW & New England
Western	Murrumbidgee, Far West & Western NSW

Member responsibilities

- notify My Forever Family NSW at least 24 hours before if they are unable to attend a meeting
- co-operate with others to ensure the meetings operate effectively and efficiently
- treat all members with courtesy and respect

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Caring for those who care for kids

- act with diligence and care in carrying out the duties of the Carer Advisory Group
- disclose any conflicts of interest, including financial or personal benefit
- refrain from raising individual issues or cases at meetings and ensure the focus reflects the best interest of children and young people and a constructive approach
- work with members to identify and discuss opportunities for positive change in processes or policy areas
- contribute constructively to discussions on other OOHC referred by DCJ or other OOHC bodies/groups (for example peer support groups, CREATE).

My Forever Family's responsibilities

- convene and chair meetings and prepare the meeting agenda seeking input from group members
- ensure meetings are purposeful and efficient and that all members are treated with courtesy and respect
- promote the activities or actions (where appropriate) of the Carer Advisory Group to carers within the district/area e.g. via agency and carer networks.
- distribute minutes within four weeks following the Carer Advisory Group meeting.

Meeting frequency and content

Each Carer Advisory Group will meet four times per year, in line with financial year quarters. Meetings will be held online on Teams.

Standing agenda items will include MFF and DCJ updates. Specific topics/themes for discussion will be added to each agenda with a focus on a specific statewide systemic issue and/or concerns that have been observed by the MFF operations team. Members will be reminded two weeks before each meeting to confirm attendance and propose any agenda items. The cut off for agenda items will be one week before each meeting.

Expenses

Membership on the Carer Advisory Group is voluntary (unpaid). Where a carer is required to travel distance, then travel may be claimed or reimbursed at the discretion of the OOHC Manager from the relevant OOHC Agency or DCJ.

Recognition of participation

It is recommended that carer participation on the CAG be recognised on the carer's file. Similarly, participation on the CAG by agency staff should be recognised as a learning and development opportunity. From time to time training and forum opportunities may be offered to all members.

Name: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

October 2024

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