

OUR AGENCY

The Department of Children and Families provides a range of services focused on protecting children in the Northern Territory from harm. Our main offices are in Casuarina, Palmerston, Katherine, Nhulunbuy, Central Australia and Tennant Creek.

The Department is focused on growing our capacity to deliver key child protection, out-of-home care and family support services across the Territory, for children and families living in challenging and complex circumstances.

OUR VISION

To improve the lives of vulnerable children and support families and communities to keep children safe.

OUR VALUES

We are:

- > **Responsive** to the needs of children, young people and families.
- > **Respectful** in our dealings with clients, partners, stakeholders and one another.
- > **Accountable** in our decision making, governance and processes.

OUR ROLE

Is to:

- > Intervene to protect children from harm.
- > Support and improve the wellbeing of children in our care.
- > Provide parenting and family support to assist families to minimise harm and strengthen capacity.
- > Partner with families, communities and agencies to protect and care for children.

WE WORK

- > In the best interests of the child.
- > Collaboratively with other agencies, services and carers.
- > With families to promote child safety and wellbeing.
- > Through transparent and open decision making and professional and accountable conduct.
- > By recognising and respecting our clients and partners' experiences and expertise.

OUR PRIORITIES

Effective legislation and accountable practice

- > Implement a Mandatory Reporter Guide to assist professional notifiers to make effective and informed notifications under the *Care and Protection of Children Act*.
- > Review the operation of Central Intake, its processes, decision making and staffing to ensure DCF intake services are positioned to meet increasing numbers of child protection reports.
- > Establish processes to increase referral and support options for vulnerable families and young people as an alternative to, or diversion from, the statutory child protection system.
- > Implement a Performance Plan which nominates and defines agreed practice improvements over the next 18 months, and beyond.
- > Develop and implement a continuum within DCF Policy and Procedures that defines and guides decision making with respect to permanency planning to promote stability for children.
- > Introduce amendments to the *Care and Protection of Children Act* to improve its application to contemporary child protection practice.

Improved service delivery models to support families

- > Provide programs that deliver child safety interventions and intensive family preservation and reunification services for vulnerable children and families who have been subject to child protection investigations, and promote and support stability in kinship care through post placement support options.
- > Review and revise DCF's policies and procedures to promote a focus on timely and active reunification within a specified timeframe.

- > Work with Department of Education on a protocol and guidelines to respond to problem sexualised behaviours in children in education and care settings.
- > Develop a DCF Remote Service model based on remote service teams that work collaboratively with urban offices and contribute to investigations, family support, carer assessment and review.

Better outcomes for children in care

- > Establish the Community Care Children's Service in Tennant Creek and Katherine to provide safe care for children under 12 years of age and to keep them close to their communities of origin.
- > Increase the number of Foster and Kinship Carers across the Northern Territory through a dedicated recruitment campaign and improved assessment and support services for carers.
- > Develop the specialist foster carer model and its associated assessment, training and support services to increase home based care options for children with complex needs.
- > Introduce Permanent Care Orders under the *Care and Protection of Children Act* and associated procedures for selection, assessment and application to the Court.
- > Develop and implement a therapeutic model of residential care in services operated by the Department of Children and Families.
- > Consolidate and implement strategies to improve quality and safety in residential care services through implementation of a Residential Review Panel to meet with children in residential care services to promote the *Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Care in the Northern Territory* and to improve our understanding and responses to the child's experiences and expectations of care.
- > Revise and improve the current planning processes, support options and pathways for children transition from care to independent living.

Improved corporate systems and processes to enable DCF and its workforce to deliver outcomes for children and families

- > Review the current allowances and incentives for foster and kinship carers in recognition of the important role and responsibilities of carers.
- > Introduce revised case load ratios that are more sensitive to differences in workloads associated with case types and case complexity and to improve case priority and allocation.
- > Undertake a service delivery review of the statutory child protection system to reduce duplication and inefficient processing with respect to administration, documentation, record keeping and authorisation. The review will prioritise intake, investigations, case closures and family support.
- > Revise and reform the Care and Protection Policies and Procedures Practice manual to reflect legislative and policy decisions and to more explicitly guide professional judgement and decision making.
- > Stabilise and sustainably support our workforce through a Workforce Development Plan that sets out how the current and future needs of the agency and its staff to meet the challenges and opportunities that will arise in the next five years.
- > Develop an agreed Business Case for a new Client Information Management System to better position DCF to meet future client information management needs.