

# UPDATE 61

## Royal Commission – Out of Home Care



Wednesday 18 March 2015 – Day 7

Case Study 24 into out of home care continued in Sydney today with the final non-government panel giving evidence about the systems, policies, practices and procedures for supporting children who have been sexually abused in out-of-home care.

The five-member panel comprised Mr Paul McDonald, Chief Executive Officer of Anglicare Victoria, Ms Sandie de Wolf, Chief Executive Officer of Berry Street, Mr Stephen Walkerden, General Manager United Protestant Association, Ms Connie Salamone, Director Strategy and Services VACCA and Ms Karen Larkman, General Manager Family & Community, CatholicCare Sydney.

Ms Larkman told the Royal Commission that based on her 15-years of experience working in the United Kingdom, the training and oversight of foster carers in Australia falls behind standards in the UK.

Ms Larkman said while there is an expectation all foster carers attend five training sessions a year there are always a number who don't attend. "I think it would be useful as a sector as a whole if we had mandatory training."

She also said there are possible conflicts in the panels that are used in out-of-home care to approve foster carers.

"I think the panels here could be far more robust than they are and far more oversight in panels when foster carers are assessed.

She said it is often the case that a foster carer assessment panel is made up of the same agency people who have recommended a candidate be approved to work as a foster carer.

"The panel, more often than not, is an agency panel, so for me it's a bit of a conflict of interest, because agencies are assessing foster carers and then they are providing a panel that approves the foster carers."

Ms Larkman said she would like to see multi-agency panels made up of health, education, mental health and other experts to determine the suitability of proposed foster carers.

Connie Salamone, Director Strategy and Services from the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency said understanding child sexual assault within an Aboriginal context requires an understanding of significant cultural issues and intergenerational trauma.

"It would be important to be looking at child sexual assault counselling services that really have a very strong Indigenous focus, run by Indigenous organisations, for example.

Ms Salamone told the Commission there are currently no such services.

"So we would have counsellors through our clinicians to do some individual work with children, but it is not a service set up as such. So, for me, that's a critical gap in our service system," she said.

The Commission heard last week there are more than 50,000 children in out-of-home care in Australia with at least half of these in foster care.

The out of home care hearing has now concluded. The Royal Commission will issue a consultation paper later in the year. It will seek submissions in response from interested parties into the direction of its final recommendations for out-of-home care in Australia.

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