



**My Forever
Family NSW**

Caring for those who care for kids

CARER REFERENCE GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE

Background

The NSW Out-of-Home Care Standards are used by the Office of the Children's Guardian for the accreditation and quality improvement of out-of-home care services (OOHC) 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 out-of-home care services are provided.

The Carer Reference Group (CRG) provides a collaborative and interagency setting for carers to work alongside out-of-home care 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. CRGs enable a more localised approach to participation and help inform decision-making and improvements to foster, relative and kinship care in NSW.

CRG representation reflects the changed out-of-home care sector given the transition of out-of-home care from DCJ to the non-government sector and the introduction of the Permanency Support Program— with more than 50 non-government organisations now funded to deliver permanency support services.

More broadly, Carer Reference Groups embed carer participation into localised service delivery so carers' voices may be heard and contribute to building a stronger out-of-home care 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, training, retention, peer support 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.
- inform and support the work of My Forever Family NSW to recruit, support and train foster carers across NSW.

Objectives

Carer Reference Groups benefit local children and young people in care, their families and carers and the local delivery of the permanency support program, including out-of-home care 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 state-wide agenda.

My Forever Family NSW

enquiries@myforeverfamily.org.au | 1300 782 975 | PO Box 595 Dulwich Hill, NSW 2203 | myforeverfamily.org.au

My Forever Family NSW is a program operated by ADOPT CHANGE LIMITED
and funded by the NSW Government Department of Family and Community Services, now Department of Communities and Justice
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- 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 out-of-home care 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 CRGs views are heard

My Forever Family NSW supports local groups and advocates on behalf of the CRGs 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 state-wide 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. Systemic issues raised at forums are 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. In addition, carer forums with CRG appointed representatives will be held to discuss results and changes resulting from the NSW Carer Survey outcomes.

Membership

Membership is to reflect the diversity of carers and carer types within each area of NSW – 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.

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 approximately 12-18 month terms, subject to local issues and work
- a rotating roster of agency staff and DCJ staff for chair and minute taker is set.
- if unavailable for a meeting, agency staff members have responsibility to allocate another staff member to attend and advise 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.

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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.
- act with diligence and care in carrying out the duties of the Carer Reference 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 out-of-home care issues referred by DCJ or other OOHC bodies/groups (for example peer support groups, CREATE).

Chairperson's responsibilities

- convene and chair or co-chair meetings; 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 Reference Group to carers within the district/area e.g. via Agency and carer networks.
- **NOTE:** A copy of the CRG minutes should be provided to enquiries@myforeverfamily.org.au within 2 weeks following the Carer Reference Group for My Forever Family NSW sign off and endorsement before the minutes are distributed.

Meeting frequency

Each Carer Reference Group is to meet a minimum of four times per year. Additional meetings or events may be agreed by members, with consideration about the practical challenges of distance, travel time and availability.

Expenses

Membership on the Carer Reference 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 CRG be recognised on the carer's file. Similarly, participation on the CRG 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: _____

July 2021

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