

Hi,

My name is Georgia EDYVANE.

For over 6 years I have observed children requiring assistance and the way the system deals with these children in crisis. I have also dealt with adolescents in residential care and observed the absolute failure of this way of caring for vulnerable youth.

I have a passion and active interest in the care and welfare of children.

3.5

STRENGTHS.

- There are many wonderful foster carers that do a great job looking after kids in difficult circumstances. The strengths of the system are these people and the dedicated social workers that like the carers are extremely overworked and under valued.

WEAKNESSES.

-Unfortunately there are quite a number of foster carers who are in it for other reasons rather than the best interests of the children. These carers have no emotional attachment to the kids and may be able to meet basic needs (food, shelter) but do not make any effort to meet the significant emotional needs of the child. I have met and liaised with quite a few of these types of carers whose motivation seem to be accolades from others and earning a bit of money while putting in the minimum effort.

-As there is a lack of foster carers, poor quality carers are getting through the system and the criteria and standard the carer needs to meet is low.

-Due to the high stress and under valuing of the job of social workers, dhs workers and quality carers there is a significant turnover of good people. Often the ones that remain are the ones that don't care.

-Counselling and support services are extremely limited to both carers and children in care (all who have experienced trauma) due to limited funding.

- Legislation that seems to favour the rights of parents overrides the safety and rights of children. The permanent care/adoption process is extremely demanding on carers and many are rejected or dissuaded from beginning due to the harsh criteria. This is very unfortunate for the older children and high needs children awaiting permanent care.

3.5.1

ADDRESSING IDENTIFIED WEAKNESSES

-In my opinion there is a very simple answer. The very best we can do for these vulnerable children and youths is to place them with loving, caring, accepting, resilient families. **Put more money into the care of vulnerable children by paying the carers significantly more to care. There is an extreme lack of good carers and this is due to the fact that a lot of good people cannot afford to stay at home and look after these kids. If carers were paid for example 50,000 a year there would be people lining up to do it, not just because of the money but because they could afford to give up their jobs to do something good. Due to many more people applying to be carers a much stricter criteria could be established and enforced. Foster caring would become a lot more valued because of the value being put into it.** I believe that paying carers significantly more would keep children in more stable caring homes because again the quality of carers would be increased as the cream of the crop would be selected rather than desperately taking anyone as carers which is the current way. This would hopefully have a flow on effect for older kids who are in residential care. The significant increase in carers payment would encourage families to take on these kids rather than have them living in an impersonal, unsafe and crime influenced residential care facility. The kids themselves would feel more valued because the government is placing a high value on them.

- More money needs to be put in for individual counselling for every child in care and also counselling for the carers of these children. Every one of these children in care has

experienced trauma and need to be counselled to be helped through this. The carer also need counselling in how to meet the child's individual needs and also to be given strategies to deal with the child's behaviour as well as strategies to cope with the carers own stress levels. This would help both the carer and the child feel supported and prevent a breakdown in placement, which is all too familiar at the moment.

-The Permanent care/adoption process and criteria is almost opposite to the foster care process. The potential parents/carers are put through very stringent criteria, which a lot of them are unable to meet. Once the process is complete there is no carers funding and extremely limited support services. I would suggest that the criteria for the permanent carer be less stringent and more funding be made available to the carer once the process is complete in the way of carers payments.

3.5.2

OVERALL STRUCTURES APPROPRIATE

- I do not believe the overall structures are any where near appropriate for the reasons previously mentioned.

CHANGES TO BE CONSIDERED

-As previously stated more funding to carers to attract more quality carers which in turn will improve the care of vulnerable children. More compulsory funded counselling support to both child and carer. These changes will have a flow on effect and eventually reduce or even wipe out the need to have residential care facilities for youths and children. More funding for workers for the kids would also benefit in the monitoring and assessment of the needs of the child in care.

3.5.3

IMPROVE OUTCOMES CHILDREN IN CARE AND LEAVING CARE

-For children to thrive they need to know that they are loved and wanted and that they belong. They need to have a stable, secure and safe environment. Children in care have extra challenges because they have all gone through trauma and a lot can feel unloved and rejected. All these kids need and should have carers that fulfil these needs. The only way they are going to get this is for more quality carers to enter the system. The way of doing this is to offer a substantial financial incentive and also encourage carers through positive stories. Encourage established good quality carers to share their experiences to the general public through the media. Stories of positive outcomes for children in care is inspiring and motivating.

-Compulsory funded ongoing counselling for children and carers. Within the counselling framework should be the ability for the child to be heard and empowered with age appropriate decision making using common sense and reasoning.

-Support from DHS and other agencies with interaction between carers and birth families. Firm and direct legislation that is clear to all parties about rights and responsibilities that also delivers consequences if conditions are flouted/abused.

3.5.4

VIEWS OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND CARERS

-As previously stated compulsory counselling for both children in care and carers would enable the views of both to be expressed and heard.

-As is already the case, social workers assigned to each child is also good way for the child and the carers views to be heard.

3.5.5

PLACEMENT INSTABILITY AND SUCCESSFUL REUNIFICATION

-As previously stated I believe placement instability would be dramatically reduced by increasing quality carers into the system through extra funding to carers. Also compulsory funded counselling for both child and carer would help considerably.

-I understand that there are successful reunifications in families where there has been illness or accidents. However I have seen so many kids go back into homes or indeed not

be taken from homes where there is ingrained significant dysfunction. Most kids taken from these homes should be put in and maintained in functional loving homes which due to flaws in the system often doesn't happen. With the changes that I have suggested I believe that the kids taken from chronically dysfunctional homes are much better off going to new loving homes than being returned to a bandaid repaired home that will continue to traumatise them and indeed lead them to role model the dysfunction. The system of today seems to benefit the parents of these dysfunctional homes by attempting to get the kids back there as soon as possible and not taking the longterm health and wellbeing of the kids into account. Most parents that I have dealt with from these types of dysfunctional homes refuse to take any responsibility for any neglect/abuse preferring to blame the system/DHS/the police/The government or indeed anything or anyone else but themselves.

3.5.6

PERMANANT CARE

I find the permanent care process to be long, stressful and unnecessarily stringent. It is my belief that the process needs to be less stringent particularly if the child is already with the family and has been thriving. I also believe that the carers allowance needs to be maintained when the child has been placed in permanent care. Even though it is only a small amount it makes a significant difference and many carers will struggle without it. There also needs to be funded counselling for both the child and the carer for the challenging issues that do arise for both parties. Permanent carers are virtually abandoned by the system that encourages them to go it alone, which I do not agree with.

3.5.7

CURRENT VICTORIAN ADOPTION LEGISLATION

Strengths

-Has an extremely stringent selection process, good in some ways not so good in other ways.

Weaknesses

- Discriminates against a lot of people that would make good parents/carers (previous sufferers of post natal depression, families with other young children)
- Long and drawn out process
- Seems to encourage families to become independent of the dhs support services.
- Does not seem to take into account the difference between kids in foster care going into permanent care and babies going into adoption. There is a big difference between the two and current procedures give applicants the same stringent criteria which I believe is detrimental to the kids in foster care looking for permanent carers because there is already a shortage of these types of carers and suitable applicants may not have gotten through due to the extremely strict criteria. There are not a lot of people out there who are going to volunteer to look after a disabled or traumatised child without funding and then having to jump through hoops to get there. If they do go through the process and get care of the child it is then up to them to financially support the child and also fund counselling and other health issues.

Thankyou for giving me the opportunity to express my views on a subject I am passionate about. It is my belief that no child should have to go through the trauma of neglect or abuse but sadly so many do. By significantly funding the work of carers, social workers and counsellors these kids have the chance of living in loving nurturing homes that they so desperately need. I believe from my observations as a foster carer that the system is significantly flawed and unfortunately I witness heartbreak nearly every day. I have seen traumatised kids being returned to homes where no significant changes or issues have been addressed. I have seen kids remain in homes that are both unsafe and unstable. I have seen many youths in residential facilities stealing, assaulting and

flouting all authority and any effort to keep them safe. I have seen foster carers who know how to clean and cook brilliantly but make no effort to give the child in their care any form of affection. Thank goodness I have also seen some brilliant carers who whole heartedly nurture the children in their care.

Kids in care need to be shown that they are important and valued and this can be started by valuing their carers, for the kid's sake I ask that this be considered.

Georgia Edyvane

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