

## **Anjelka Obradovic – Foster Carer**

As a foster carer I have made a number of observations which seem to be shortfalls in the system and I ask that the inquiry make the following considerations in the preparation of their report and recommendations.

### **Legal considerations:**

- It seems crimes are committed against children but they are not categorized or treated as crimes except for sexual assault and/or where the injuries have resulted in death. For example, abandonment, beatings, neglect resulting in need for hospitalisation, not providing basic care, psychological abuse, exposing children to criminal activity, all don't seem to be treated as crimes but I suggest they should be.

- Given reunification is the priority in all cases, there should be compulsory courses for parents on how to parent and what is and isn't acceptable parenting once their children are removed in preparation for the children's return and prior to consideration of reunification, as there is a good chance the parents may not have been exposed to good parenting themselves. Such requirements may need to be part of the court order. Furthermore, if criminal activity, drugs and/or alcohol are the issue, referral and support to undergo rehabilitation should be compulsory and provided before reunification can be considered.

- Compulsory supervision of kinship placements. Kin carers are people in close friendship or relationship with the parents who have neglected and/or abused the children and there have been incidents where kin carers have just given the children back to the parents resulting in the children being neglected again and there have been no consequences for the kin carers or the parents for being deceitful about the kin care arrangement. In such situations kin carers and the birth parents should be charged for the fraudulent behaviour to discourage people from undertaking these arrangements on behalf of birth parents, where there is no intention of actually undertaking personal responsibility for the children.

### **Considerations in the management of cases:**

- DHS should compulsorily and regularly access criminal histories and pending charges of birth parents and this information should be utilized in making decisions as to the suitability of the children being returned to their birth parents.

- DHS should have an obligation to report illegal activity observed (e.g. driving children without appropriate seats, driving without a license), even if it is not linked explicitly to the care of the children. DHS don't seem to consider it their responsibility to report illegal activity or consider it in the management of their cases unless it is directly linked to the care of children. However, such activity is a reflection of the character and lifestyle of the individual, which should be considerations in the determination of the suitability of that individual to parent.

### **Access considerations:**

- There seems to be a lack of flexibility in changing access arrangements made in family court. Even if parents are repeatedly not showing up without notice the kids still have to be prepared for access. There needs to be some discretion for modifying access arrangements (e.g. frequency, need to confirm, whether it continues or not) in-between court hearings (which could be a year apart) and the onus should be on the parents to confirm (the day before) that they will attend before the children are prepared and taken there to wait for nothing and feel rejected.

- When parents have shown repeatedly that they cannot be trusted (e.g. longstanding and ongoing criminal histories, repeated lies and deceit to DHS workers) they should not be trusted and given additional privileges just because they make promises not to do the wrong thing. There have been episodes where children have been placed at risk on the

first unsupervised access where the parents (who have a longstanding history of lying and breaking promises) have done everything they promised they wouldn't do.

**Use of the Charter for the Care of Children in Out of Home Care across the board:**

- The Charter for the Care of Children in Out of Home Care reflects reasonable community standards for parenting and it should apply to the care of children in general in any environment they find themselves including with their own parents rather than the children having to experience a possible drop in the standard of care upon return to their birth family. This charter could be utilized when making decisions regarding the suitability of children being returned to or remaining with their birth parents.

THANK-YOU!