

Hello

Thank you for the opportunity to take part in this discussion and will endeavour to outline my impressions of the assessment process connected with child protection in the NT.

My background is, in total, some 25 years in child protection and recruiting, training and supporting foster carers. I have worked in 3 States in Australia, including Victoria, Queensland and the Northern Territory. I have worked for 10 years in the UK in child protection and foster care. I have qualifications from the UK and a graduate and post graduate degree from Monash University, Melbourne. I have been involved in consultancy work with the High Risk Infant Project in Victoria. I have been a team leader in child protection for 7 years in Victoria and Queensland.

I would make the following observation regarding working in the Northern Territory in the Assessment Team relating to Child Protection:-

- 1) The throughput of staff is alarming and staffing numbers inadequate to cope with the work. On the subject of retaining staff it may be an idea to make financial rewards for example \$3,000 for remaining in child protection for 12 months, \$6,000 at the end of 2 years. This method is used in areas of London where it is difficult to recruit staff. Leave should be increased to 8 weeks per year to prevent 'burnout'.
- 2) Leadership needs to be strong and consistent with regular supervision given (I received one supervision session in 6 months). Mentoring may also be useful within Assessment teams. Queensland used a Regional Resource person who could be used for this purpose, or to assist with a complex case.
- 3) Support and the feeling of being valued are important and 'time out' for team-building is very important.
- 4) There was no induction program as such and should be done when employment starts (not 6/7 weeks later when a caseload has been acquired and time is precious). There needs to be an Induction manual to understand what teams and resources are available in the area.
- 5) Strategic decision making should be employed at Intake (I understand this is to be piloted)
- 6) Subsidise housing should be looked at to encourage people from Interstate to apply for positions as is provided with the Army, Police and Health workers.
- 7) Multi-disciplinary training to make sure everyone understands roles and responsibilities and also to share knowledge and useful resources should happen every 2 months.
- 8) Needs for a more structured 'handover' to other teams when a case is substantiated by the Assessment Team with a case plan of what needs to occur. Where possible this needs to be done with the family but at the same time remains child focused.

The above is not impossible and to a degree this has been achieved in the UK and in Victoria and Queensland. I realised that the Northern Territory has its own set of problems however, Indigenous Agencies in all States should be asked about "what works" in child protection.

I worked for 6 months in the Assessment Team before applying for another position because of 'self care' reasons. I am passionate about child protection but it is bloody and hard work and this needs to be recognised. Whilst I agree with using NGO's more effectively, they too need a good knowledge base to provide adequate support to 'children concern' cases.

I hope my comments and observations in relation to child protection have been useful.

Lynne Boardman, Advanced Practitioner, Regional Placement Support Unit, NT
Families and Children
Department of Health & Families, Northern Territory Government