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25 JAN 2012

The Hon Curtis Pitt MP and the Hon Robyn McSweeney MLC
Co-Chairs, Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference
Standing Council on Community, Housing and Disability Services
PO Box 344
RUNDLE MALL SA 5000

Via Email: secretariat@hcdsmc.sa.gov.au (Secretariat)

Dear Minister Pitt and Minister McSweeney

I am writing on behalf of the Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians (ACCG) to seek the support of the Standing Council on Community, Housing and Disability Services (Standing Council) to strengthen actions that will improve the outcomes for young people leaving care.

The ACCG acknowledges the role that the Standing Council and its Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council (CDSMAC) has played in progressing the 'transition from care' priority of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020. The ACCG welcomes the progress that has been made on the development of national standards for out-of-home care which incorporate a standard focusing on transition planning.

The ACCG acknowledges that, at its meeting on 21 October 2011, the Community and Disability Services Ministers agreed to a nationally consistent approach to planning for young people leaving out of home care. In light of this, the ACCG recommends that the Standing Council and CDSMAC consider the following priorities for inclusion in the 2012-2015 action plan:

- *Transition from care kits with consistent, comprehensive and practical information adapted to local conditions.* The CREATE Foundation is developing Transition from Care Kits based on a Queensland model, but adaptable to other states and territories. To facilitate a nationally consistent approach, the new action plan should include details regarding how the Commonwealth Government could commit to finance, and the states and territories to use, the kits for all young people leaving care.

- *An improved Commonwealth funding arrangement or asset base.* The Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) is insufficient to meet the costs of moving to independent living. An improved asset and/or income program could recognise the graduated approach to independence that has a number of costs at different times, particularly in relation to household goods and education.
- *Personal and relationship-based assistance in the initial years after leaving care.* This would assist young people with post-care supports such as help in finding accommodation, financial assistance, finding employment or training and education, learning life skills, legal advice, counselling and health services. The ACCG acknowledges that coordination between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments will be required to address resourcing implications of providing greater assistance to young people leaving care.
- *Additional research on outcomes for young people in care (particularly longitudinal research).* This is critical in determining which factors, resources and supports make a positive difference to outcomes for this group.
- *Planning that commences early and after care support that is effective and flexible, particularly in relation to sustaining significant relationships.* CREATE's Report Card 2011 on transitioning from care and the Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian's Views surveys of children and young people in state care have both demonstrated that planning is an ongoing and crucial issue to a successful transition process, particularly in relation to identifying and obtaining post-care supports and services. Specific additional supports for particular high-risk groups of young people, such as those with a disability and those entering early parenthood as a strategy to stop the cycle of disadvantage, also require identification as part of the transition planning process. The ACCG also considers that, as for all children, fostering skills and preparing children in care for eventual transitions to independence should form a key component of the supports provided throughout children's entire care experiences. Accordingly, to facilitate the planning process it is important that service providers and other decision makers are mindful of transition needs throughout the duration of a child's time in care. Such planning and supports should include identifying and fostering relationships and supports to appropriately prepare young people for this transition.

The ACCG seeks to promote and protect the rights, safety and wellbeing of children in Australia, particularly the most vulnerable or disadvantaged. Young people leaving care are a high priority group for the ACCG and, while more research is needed in this area, we know already that people who have been in care have higher rates of homelessness, early parenthood, mental health problems and poor educational and employment outcomes than those who have not been in care.

Consequently, the ACCG is keen to see that national planning results in practical improvements. The ACCG supports the Social Inclusion Board's overarching principles to guide such planning, that is:

- the way you treat people matters
- continuity of support is essential, and
- a focus on structural barriers must be maintained.

Thank you for considering these priorities.

Should you require any further information please contact me on (07) 3211 6700 or email me at info@ccypcg.qld.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Elizabeth Fraser
**Commissioner for Children and Young People
and Child Guardian**

Signed on behalf of participating ACCG members:

- Pam Simmons, Guardian for Children and Young People (South Australia)
- Michelle Scott, Commissioner for Children and Young People (Western Australia)
- Howard Bath, Children's Commissioner (Northern Territory)
- Alasdair Roy, Children and Young People Commissioner (ACT)
- Aileen Ashford, Commissioner for Children (Tasmania)
- Megan Mitchell, Commissioner for Children and Young People (New South Wales)
- Kerryn Boland, Children's Guardian (New South Wales), and
- Bernie Geary, Child Safety Commissioner (Victoria).

Copy to:

Ms Gill Callister
Chair, Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council

The Hon Jenny Macklin MP
Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and
Minister for Disability Reform