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Welcome ...

Well this newsletter is well and truly overdue—my apologies but hopefully you will find some interesting information. The months are moving along very quickly and before we know it we will be winding up another productive year— and in the foreseeable future we will be holding another AGM.

In order to ensure your membership is up to date for the AGM (due in October) it would be helpful if you renewed this now . The membership form is attached to this newsletter.

So what's been happening over the first half of this year? The number of requests for assistance from families has been fairly consistent with a high number of families receiving an Immediate Response or intervention. This is a very beneficial way of working which assists a family to identify the main concerns the dept. has raised, clarify infor-

mation for parents and their case workers and develop a plan that is achievable and all parties can work toward. This brief intervention provides a positive opportunity for our advocates to assist in mediating between the parties, negotiate any issues and try to ensure there are no gaps in communication.

Due to changes in government funding arrangements our current contract was extended to June 2013; this was to allow more time for the department to implement the changes required. The re-negotiations of our contracting will commence at in September or October.

In order to inform our negotiations with our funders we have undertaken a review process facilitated by the generosity of 2 consultants, Jacque Hagan and Nigel Jones from Leadership WA. They have completed the first phase of the process by interviewing parents, members of Fin WA (many of you would have

been interviewed), staff, key stakeholders within the sector including other service providers and a broad cross section of personnel at DCP—including team leaders, directors and executive. The feedback was very positive and encouraging stating that the work of Fin WA is providing a valuable 'voice' for parents within the system. The next stage is a Development Day to consider the way forward in our negotiations with our funding.

Recently funding submissions have been made to FaHCSIA for a research grant - this is in partnership with the Women's Law Centre; another FaHCSIA application was made in partnership with with the Edmund Rice Center and DCP Mirrabooka for a CaLD worker to provide education workshops and advocacy in the Mirrabooka area.

Thanks
everyone



Workshops in 2012 to assist parents learn more about DCP and legal process-



*Foster Carer
Training ...*

Workshops for 2012

As most of you will be aware over the past few years we have been running 'Information and Support' sessions 3 times per month, in Joondalup, Perth and Rockingham. Unfortunately the number of parents and family members attending has been low and this has placed our limited resources under pressure. So in partnership with the Women's Law Centre we trialed a series of evening workshops for parents and family members based on our document

'Finding Your Way with DCP'.

Those who attended received worthwhile information and tips on how to proceed with the department in their particular circumstances.

Unfortunately due to the low attendance we have decided to postpone any further workshops at this time. However there have been initial discussions with a few agencies about providing the workshops to clients they are currently working with. It

is anticipated that workers from the agencies could also attend and in doing so provide support to their clients—this may be the key to getting parents along. Whilst topics include information about department and court processes there is a focus on 'what are parents rights?' and 'how can I get DCP to listen to me?'

If your agency is interested in having us run a workshop for your clients please get in touch with Debbie 9227 5818.

Training & Presentations

Fin WA provided a 3 hour training workshop to departmental foster carers in June. There were 15 participants with a mix of carers, case workers and assessors. The training included a discussion about 'Perceptions and attitudes towards parents' plus a video of a parent sharing his story about his involvement with DCP; participants found this to be of particular relevance and provided them with insight and understanding into the journey parents experience.

A training session with Wanslea Family Services foster carers is also being conducted in July.



In the first half of this year, presentations have been made to DCP Reunification Team in Peel and the Intake/Assessment and Children in Care teams at Cannington and Rock-

ingham.

There was a sector Practice Development Day entitled 'Working Collaboratively and in Partnership'. Fin WA presented a case study which was challenging and stimulated a lot of discussion regarding the difficulties faced when various agencies work in isolation, are reluctant to share their expertise or get caught up in power struggles with the dept. to the detriment of families. It was a well received presentation.

Legislation Review...

The Children's and Community Services Act 2004 is currently under review. Fin WA has submitted a response and did so in partnership with the Women's Law Centre of WA.

Issues raised focused on the various orders and concerns about the lack of adherence to application time frames, and Special Guardianship Orders having no safeguards in relation to contact arrangements for parents.

The report from the review will be handed down later in the year.

Students ...



During this first semester of the academic year we had a 4th year social work student with us; read about Lani's experience on the back page. During Lani's time with us we conducted 3 student group learning sessions in which the profile of parents involved with DCP were highlighted. The students were very appreciative to learn of the experience of parents as it is often the 'untold story' in their child protection studies.

Starting next semester we will have another student from ECU; in fact it will be Lisa Lee—yes our own staff member (read her profile below). Lisa will be combining her placement with her work whilst here; she will have her work cut out as she hopes to get more experience of working with families but she also has a keen interest in research and policy so we are investigating the best way to use her skills. Lisa is also preparing to do her honours next year.

Getting to know us ... Lisa Lee

I was born and raised on the south coast of England and since leaving school at age 16 I have worked in various admin/accounts position.

In 2000 I decided to have a career change into childcare and studied to achieve my qualifications which are equivalent to a Diploma in Children's Services. I worked in pre-school childcare and as a Teaching Assistant at Primary School. This work fitted well with my (then) very young children.

I continued this until 2003 when I decided to study again, but this time a degree in Theology. Unfortunately, I didn't finish this degree due to personal health issues. I moved back into the 'safety' of admin for 2 years and left that role to pursue our long term family dream of moving to Australia in 2007.

When we arrived here I started work for Anglicare at Daisy House, Girrawheen in January 2008 as the administration officer for Community Parks Project; later that year I coupled that role with that of Emergency Relief Officer.

It was at Daisy House that I decided that a career in Social Work was for me and I then changed my role to Fin WA in January 2009 and also began my Social Work degree at Curtin University.

I find that study and my role at Fin WA mesh well together. I have since moved to Edith Cowan University to continue my study on a full time basis which provides me with a flexible learning environment. I am currently in my 3rd year of study. I'm married and have 2 teenage children, 17 year old son and 15 year old daughter. It's not al-

ways easy juggling a family, study and work but I love what I do and it's exciting to be involved in an evolving agency that promotes the rights of Parents with Children in Care. I hope to continue to be involved in Fin WA's ongoing journey.



Reflections from Lani our student ...

Hello FinWA readers,

My name is Lani Melrose and I'm a 4th year social work student from Curtin University. For the last 4 months I have had the pleasure of having my final placement with the incredible team at the Family Inclusion Network. This experience has been both a personal and professional learning journey I will never forget and an opportunity I imagine a number of other students may envy due to my 'ranting and raving' about the wonderful work of Fin and fabulous people involved.

From the 'get-go' I was warmly welcomed into this team of dedicated, supportive and compassionate workers, each coming with their own knowledge, experience and expertise. I have learnt a number of valuable lessons regarding myself and my future practice and I generally had the opportunity to get to know the 'colourful characters' of Fin :)

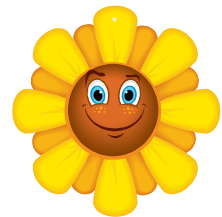
I continue to be amazed by the level of compassion and commitment Fin workers have for parents involved with the Department for Child Protection. On a daily basis parents and family members will call with stories of loss, grief, heartache and devastation. There were many times I would find myself hanging up the phone after a 50 minute conversation feeling so overwhelmed with hopelessness and hurt for the families; then after a couple sneaky tears I would go shuffling into someone's office for yet another 'de-brief'. From there we would look at the possibilities and options available for these families and yet again the warm glow of hope would return to my heart.

Throughout my time with Fin I have also been exposed to the remarkable strength and resilience found within the various parents and family members that come in contact with Fin. Despite the grief and loss parents were experiencing having had their children taken into care, it was always the top priority to have their children safe at home, surrounded and supported with the love of their families. I feel it an honour to have heard the stories of resilience and willpower these parents have experienced and I am inspired by the inner-strength that is required to face many of the challenges these families are met with.

I wish Fin WA all the very best in their future endeavours and have every confidence that whatever direction Fin takes families will continue to be treated with the upmost respect and receive support and advocacy of the highest quality. I also wish to thank all the families that shared their stories and experiences with me and openly involved me in their dealings with Fin and the department - your strength and love for your children will remain with me forever.

Sincerely

Lani Melrose ... Future Social Worker :)



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