

Meeting Communiqué Sydney : 20 - 21 May 2015

The Australian Children's Commissioners & Guardians (ACCG) is the network of children and young people Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates.

The ACCG meets twice each year, and aims to promote and protect the safety, well-being and rights of children and young people in Australia, and ensure that the best interests of children and young people are considered in public policy and program development across Australia.

The ACCG met in Sydney on the 20th and 21st of May 2015.

Welcome to Country

The meeting began with a Welcome to Country from Uncle Ray Davison.

New South Wales Advocate for Children & Young People

The ACCG welcomed the NSW Advocate for Children & Young People (ACYP), Mr Andrew Johnson, as a new member of ACCG. The ACYP works to improve the safety, welfare and wellbeing of all children and young people in NSW; speaks up for children and young people to get their points of view heard and engages with children and young people across NSW. The ACYP is also responsible for developing, in consultation with the relevant Minister, a draft whole of government Strategic Plan for Children and Young People in NSW.

Evaluation of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children

Prior to the meeting, members of the ACCG had contributed to the evaluation of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children. Members shared their contributions, agreeing that the Framework might benefit from: a National 'ambassador' to champion the Framework; a change of focus from child protection to child well-being; greater clarity around the governance of the Framework and its relevance to other work currently being undertaken across Australia.

Third National Action Plan 2015-2018

The ACCG received a briefing from the Department of Social Services about the development of the Third National Action Plan 2015-2018. The ACCG agreed in principle with the proposed five priorities of the Action Plan, however recommended that the Plan: focus on child well-being (rather than child protection); have clear and measurable actions and performance indicators; and include a solid commitment to ongoing, meaningful, and respectful consultation with children and young people about the Plan and issues important to them.

ACCG National Convenor

The ACCG nominated the ACT Children & Young People Commissioner, Mr Alasdair Roy, as the ACCG National Convenor for the next year. The role of the National Convenor is to act as the ACCG's contact point and to assist in the dissemination of information for the ACCG.

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

The ACCG received a briefing from representatives of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Issues discussed included: a soon to be released position paper

on Working with Children Checks; progress on work to date on Child Safe/Child Friendly Organisations; and the development of mechanism and safeguards to ensure that private sessions with children and young people are effective and age appropriate.

The ACCG encouraged the Royal Commission to examine the institutional responses to the sexual abuse of children and young people by other children and young people in Out-of-Home-Care, and the sexual abuse of children and young people in immigration detention. The ACCG welcomed the subsequent announcement by the Royal Commission that it will be considering allegations of sexual abuse of children and young people in immigration detention centres within Australia.

The ACCG also encouraged the Royal Commission to actively seek the views of children and young people about the effectiveness and relevance of potential recommendations to be made by the Royal Commission.

The Royal Commission invited members of the ACCG to appear at hearings scheduled for late June 2015 about preventing and responding to sexual abuse in Out-of-Home-Care.

Domestic & International Surrogacy

The ACCG agreed to continue to engage with the Standing Committee on Social Policy & Legal Affairs in relation to surrogacy, and to prepare guiding principles based on the rights of children and young people to inform further discussions.

Children & Young People in Youth Detention

ACCG members updated each other on actions taken within individual jurisdictions with respect to implementation of the ACCG's *Model Charter of Rights for Children & Young People Detained in Youth Justice Facilities*. The ACCG will continue to monitor implementation of, and compliance with, the Charter.

The ACCG discussed work to date on joint ACCG research into the use of restraint, seclusion and strip-searching in Australian youth justice facilities. A draft report on the outcomes of the research will be considered by the ACCG at its next meeting in November 2015.

Impact of Family Violence on Children & Young People

The ACCG welcomed work currently being undertaken by the National Children's Commissioner on the impact of family violence on children and young people. This includes: a literature review; sourcing of original data; a series of expert roundtables; invited submissions; and interviews with children and families. A report on the outcome of the National Children's Commissioner's examination will be tabled in federal parliament and publically available in December 2015.

Education for Vulnerable Children & Young People

The ACCG remains interested in the education of vulnerable children and young people, including children and young people in Out-of-Home Care. The ACCG welcomed the research being undertaken by the WA Commissioner for Children & Young People on this issue, and looks forward to discussing at its next meeting in November 2015 how it can build on this work.

Proof of Identity & Citizenship for Children & Young People in Out-of-Home-Care

The ACCG welcomed the Professor Fiona Arney, Chair of the SA Council for the Care of Children, who spoke about the difficulties some children and young people in Out-of-Home Care experience in obtaining various identification and citizenship documents, including passports. The ACCG briefed Professor Arney on work undertaken by the ACCG on the same issue.

The ACCG agreed to write to the Hon Scott Morrison MP, Minister for Social Services, noting our concerns about this issue; encouraging its inclusion in the Third National Action Plan 2015-2018.

Professional Foster Care

The ACCG considered the Professional Foster Care, Barriers, Opportunities & Options report (ACIL Allen, 2013).

The ACCG agreed to write to the Hon Scott Morrison MP, Minister for Social Services, commending the report, and seeking an update on the Government's response to the report.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the ACCG will be held in Canberra, in November 2015.

For further information on the ACCG and the work of Australia's Children's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates, please contact the ACCG National Convenor, Mr Alasdair Roy, on (02) 62052222, or at ACTkids@act.gov.au.