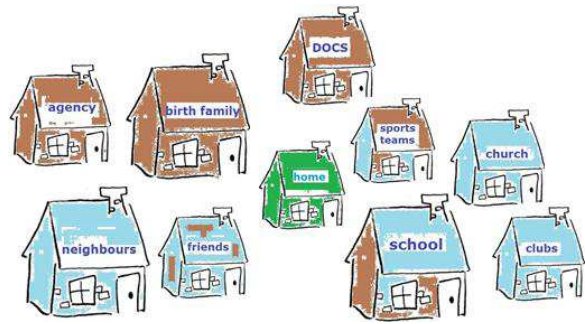


Village Based Foster Care

Brent Sweeney



25 September 2012

The Hon Tim Carmody SC

Commissioner

Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry

Dear Commissioner Carmody

Re: Submission to the Child Protection Commission of Inquiry

Terms of Reference c)i, *whether the current use of available resources across the child protection system is adequate and whether the resources can be used more efficiently*

I am a foster carer in Brisbane with a keen interest in helping carers provide high quality care outcomes for children in care. Over the past six months I've been part of a collaborative process that aims to shift the paradigm of foster-care stakeholders from "foster-carers" to "foster-village". Most carers become isolated which contributes to high carer turnover, but with a village mindset carers can potentially sustain care for longer, make more efficient use of department resources and provide better care outcomes for children in their care.

The adage that *"it takes a village to raise a child"* has never been truer than when it comes to children in foster care. Better outcomes for foster children and their foster parents occur when there is a community of people working together in a way that emulates a healthy neighbourhood. In these cases an array of relationships between family, friends, neighbours and professionals mix together in an un-forced way, creating a context for care that is good for the child, supportive for the foster parents and less resource intensive for the department. Village based foster care simply suggests that, while healthy village-like community rarely occurs naturally, the elements of such a community exist and we can intentionally form villages who will provide a broad-based context for care.

Outcomes from village-based care

1. Better community based care for the children in care

- Constant dependable relationships irrespective of department and agency personnel changes
- A wider network of positive relationships for the child, they are truly raised by the village.

2. Tailored community based support for foster carers

- An active village provides real-time support for carers in a natural way that cannot be replicated by an agency or departmental worker.
- Improved support for carers will reduce carer burnout and turnover – another cost saving.
- Improved carer support will potentially improve word-of-mouth recruitment of new carers.

3. More efficient use of resources through cost savings

- Less reliance on departmental resources by foster carers. For example, in some cases of village-based care, respite demands on the department have been reduced to zero, saving significant costs.

4. Reduced stress on departmental staff

- Because village-based foster carers are empowered to look for solutions among their village, they are less likely to look to their department worker for most needs. This lowers expectations of departmental staff.
- In some regions up to half of the child-placement requests can be for respite. Eliminating or drastically reducing this load will relieve an enormous load off staff.

What is the village?

- A village is not a family. It includes families, but more importantly it is a whole series of interconnected relationships in which an individual naturally belongs, is noticed, is given opportunity and is cared for when needs arise.
- A person will have some very close relationships within a village, some less intimate and others at arms-length. All types are essential for healthy community.
- The family always takes primary responsibility for the care of a child, but the village provides support for parents, intermittent care for the child and broader opportunities for relationship.
- A village includes neighbours, friends, family, schools, doctors, professionals etc.

Creating a village that cares

A village needs to be created because we live in a disconnected world. In *Village Based Foster Care*:

- foster-carers begin to create a village before a placement occurs by identifying and intentionally inviting people to be a part of the village that will care for children that come into their home.
- Village creation forms part of the recruitment and training of foster carers.
- once a placement is established the village expands as it welcomes a foster child and their relationships.

Recommendation

That the Department of Communities support and fund the training and coaching of foster carers to adopt a Village-Based Foster Care approach.