

COMMUNITY SERVICES

"After working in juvenile justice services for 15 years I wanted to give kids a good start from a younger age. It's important that we work to keep Aboriginal kids with Aboriginal carers so they can feel connected to their identity."

ERIC, CAMPBELLTOWN FOSTER CARER



Community Services

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S FOREWORD

This year, Community Services has seen consolidated change under the reform program following the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. A key focus has been preparation for changes to the out-of-home care (OOHC) system including the transfer to non-government organisations (NGOs).

Preparations included planning the establishment of a joint non-government and government Ministerial Advisory Group to help guide the transfer of OOHC services to NGOs and meet the timeframes for the development of new OOHC contracts by January 2012.

I have also been involved in the establishment of the Early Intervention Council to oversee the implementation of improvements to the Brighter Futures reforms.

We have continued our commitment to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children and families in the statutory child protection system with the development of the Protecting Aboriginal Children Together (PACT) consultation model and the Aboriginal Consultation Guide, and reaffirmed our commitment to assisting 'Forgotten Australians' – people who grew up in former institutions, orphanages and children's homes – with the opening of a statewide support service.

Throughout the changes this year, the professionalism, dedication, resourcefulness and empathy of those who work in the challenging area of child protection continue to inspire me. I am confident that together with the non-government sector we will continue to find smarter and more effective ways of delivering child protection services into the future.



Anne Campbell

Acting Chief Executive
Community Services

Note: Anne Campbell was appointed Acting Chief Executive, Community Services on 1 July 2011 following the retirement of Annette Gallard.

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Overview

WHO WE ARE

Community Services works closely with other government departments, NGOs and the community to support vulnerable families and keep children and young people safe from abuse and neglect.

WHAT WE DO

We provide and fund services which help to make communities more resilient and invest in prevention and early intervention strategies to help families deal with issues before they become crises.

The key responsibilities of Community Services¹ are:

- providing protection for children and young people at risk of significant harm
- providing and funding early intervention services
- providing funding, accommodation and support services for children and young people who can no longer live at home
- offering community support services to help homeless people and families move to independent living.

OUR STAKEHOLDERS

Our stakeholders include:

- children and young people in need of care and protection
- families and communities needing help and support
- non-government service providers and local, state and Commonwealth governments
- research organisations, universities, students, the media and the public (who collaborate on or receive the division's data and research findings)
- public users of our information services.

Our highlights

In 2010–11, Community Services:

- received 166,700 calls, faxes and eReports at the Child Protection Helpline from mandatory reporters such as police, teachers and health workers, as well as the public, resulting in 215,272 child and young person reports
- received more than 22,073 calls to the Domestic Violence Line
- extended the Staying Home Leaving Violence Program to 18 locations and ensured that 500 families received specialist case management services
- trained more than 300 welfare, health and educational professionals to deliver the Triple P Positive Parenting Program and 165 practitioners to deliver the Indigenous Triple P, bringing the total number of practitioners to 1,200
- provided additional funding of \$3.7 million to 62 Aboriginal child, youth and family projects including parenting programs, school transition programs, supported playgroups, family workers and programs to build the capacity of the community to respond to challenges
- funded 358 specialist homelessness services to support those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- supported 17,896 children and young people in OOH as at 30 June 2011
- provided more than \$51 million in funding for Brighter Futures services to 16 lead agencies to provide case management, structured home visiting, group parenting programs and quality children's services to client families
- provided funding of \$11.2 million under the new early intervention and placement program to 117 service providers for a total of 130 expanded and new services
- funded almost 1,500 children's services projects across mobile services, long day care, preschools, occasional care, multi-purpose centres, toy libraries, support services and resource groups
- referred 4,249 child protection reports to Joint Investigation Response Teams comprising Community Services, NSW Police and NSW Health
- recruited, assessed, trained and authorised 328 new foster carers
- published Caring for Kids, providing information for carers about their roles, responsibilities and entitlements, and information about relevant policies
- facilitated adoption of 45 children by their foster carers or relative carers.

¹ During the year, we were also responsible for funding and regulating children's services such as preschools and day care centres and coordinating recovery services to help people affected by disasters. In April 2011, the responsibility for Children's Services moved to the Department of Education and Communities and Disaster Recovery moved to the Ministry for Police and Emergency Services.

Our performance

The programs and activities of Community Services are based on objectives and performance targets in the NSW State Plan, key recommendations from Keep Them Safe and corporate planning documents. Copies are available at www.community.nsw.gov.au

KEEP THEM SAFE

Keep Them Safe (KTS) is a five-year action plan in response to the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. The plan aims to reshape the way family and community services are delivered in NSW to improve the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people.

The goal of KTS is that all children in NSW are healthy, happy and safe, and grow up belonging in families and communities where they have opportunities to reach their full potential.

In particular, KTS includes actions to enhance the universal service system, improve early intervention services, better protect children at risk, support Aboriginal children and families, and strengthen partnerships with NGOs in the delivery of services.

The KTS reforms are supported through a range of initiatives, programs and partnerships. These are explained in more detail throughout this chapter of the report.

PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Service delivery			
Total budget provided	\$1.349 billion	\$1.568 billion	\$1.67 billion
Total child protection reports	309,676	256,088	215,272
Rate per 1,000 of population of children and young people involved in reports for further assessment/risk of significant harm (ROSH) reports	71.1	55.4	37.3
Child protection reports referred for further assessment/ROSH reports	226,946	163,200	98,845
Number of Joint Investigative Response Team referrals accepted	3,436	3,877	4,249
Children and young people in out-of-home care	16,524	17,400	17,896
Rate per 1,000 population of children and young people in out-of-home care	10.2	10.7	10.9
Annual real expenditure per child in out-of-home care	\$33,433	\$36,869	\$39,146
Calls to domestic violence line	23,061	23,039	22,073
No. of funded children's services	1,583	1,532	1,462
Estimated funded places per day	45,477	45,342	42,978
Licensed children's services	3,440	3,452	3,517
Estimated licensed places per day	154,351	135,238	146,795
No. of children aged 0-5 years who attended funded, licensed children's services in NSW	87,470	86,222	93,502
No. of children from low income families for whom childcare fees were reduced*	23,978	25,543	24,547
Resources			
No. of staff	4,553	4,564	4,842
No. of caseworkers	2,187	2,212	2,320
No. of female staff	3,752	3,765	3,947
No. of Aboriginal staff	356	355	386
No. of multicultural staff	395	398	380

* This total includes 435 existing services and 29 new services.

Sources:

- 1 KIDS-Corporate Information Warehouse annual data.
- 2 ABS ERP NSW by age, sex as at 30 June 2007-10.
- 3 ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing, NSW by Local Government Area.
- 4 Integrated Substitute Care database annual statistical abstracts and KiDS/MDS.
- 5 Financial data collection, Finance and Administration Services.

Produced by: Community Services Information Management Branch.

Building stronger communities

We coordinate a range of community and family programs. We oversee the delivery of services which strengthen families, support young people and help families with issues like homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, and family violence. Programs range from parenting courses and volunteer home visiting to domestic violence and drug and alcohol support services.

DISASTER WELFARE

Along with our partners, we provide welfare and assistance to people during disasters.

Emergency Management Committees provide a whole-of-government forum to discuss preparedness and planning for disasters. In 2010–11, our staff contributed to more than 40 meetings.

Regional meetings with the disaster recovery partners and stakeholders ensure that localised planning takes place.

A new memorandum of understanding with the Uniting Church of Australia will provide pastoral care for people in traumatic situations following major emergencies.

Welfare services were provided to more than 42 disaster events, with 30 evacuation centres established and more than \$924,000 provided to individuals and families in disaster relief grants.

We responded to events in NSW and gave assistance to other states. Following the devastating impacts of Tropical Cyclone Yasi in February 2011, NSW deployed 24 FACS staff to North Queensland to assist the Queensland Department of Communities with recovery operations.

COMMUNITY BUILDERS

Services under the Community Services Grants Program, which focused on community strengthening, moved to the new Community Builders funding program. A total of 435 services valued at \$29.3 million were transferred to Community Builders.

All organisations received a portion of \$10 million in new social inclusion funding to help make the transition to Community Builders, including an additional 20 percent on top of their annual funding amount. Twenty-nine new services were also funded across NSW as part of the distribution of the \$10 million.

In 2010–11, Community Builders also funded 99 new fixed-term projects to the value of \$6.69 million.

Community Builders funding

PROGRAM	SERVICES	FUNDING TOTAL (\$M)
New fixed-term projects	99	6.69
Current fixed-term projects	89	2.20
Renewable services	435	29.30
Social inclusion	464*	10.00
Total	652	48.19

* This total includes 435 existing services and 29 new services.

Source: COMS 2010–11 and the Communities and Early Years HOLLY database 2010–11.

Building stronger communities

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ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE

Working with alcohol and drug abuse issues requires specialist skills and understanding. Drug and alcohol issues, along with domestic violence and mental health problems, are among the most common child protection reports.

We are a key partner in the Youth Drug and Alcohol Court Program, which tailors health, education and welfare interventions to support young people with serious drug and alcohol problems and diverts them away from the criminal justice system. In 2010–11, 56 young offenders entered the program.

As part of the Getting It Together Program, 15 services continued to help vulnerable young people not accessing conventional services tackle the use of illicit drugs.

Our Clinical Issues Unit helps caseworkers access expert knowledge, training, resources and support about drugs and alcohol. In 2010–11, the unit provided caseworkers with more than 3,000 individual mental health, drug and alcohol and/or domestic violence consultations, as well as 114 short courses on clinical issues.

FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The NSW Domestic Violence Line – 1800 65 64 63 – received 22,073 calls in 2010–11. The majority of these involved verbal, physical and psychological violence, and 7,666 calls involved 15,643 children.

Programwide, approximately 1,300 cases were managed, with approximately 8,000 referrals received by services and about 160 education sessions provided to the community and service providers.

An online performance monitoring system for the program began on 1 April 2011.

INTEGRATED DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES PROGRAM

During the year, \$3.1 million were provided to deliver six projects preventing the escalation of

domestic and family violence. Services provided included case management, case coordination to ensure that clients are seamlessly referred onto other services such as crisis support.

In 2010–11, the Staying Home Leaving Violence Program expanded to 18 locations across NSW – Bega, Eastern Sydney, Blacktown, Campbelltown, Newcastle, Wyong, Moree, Redfern, Penrith, Liverpool, Fairfield, Maitland, Wollongong, Kempsey, Walgett, Dubbo, Shoalhaven and Lake Macquarie.

These specialist domestic violence services provide support and safety resources to women and children escaping violence to remain safely in their own home.

A \$2.9 million budget saw 500 families receive specialist case management services including risk assessment, safety planning and security upgrades. These services were provided on a needs basis and were often long-term and intensive.

Domestic Violence Line calls answered

	2007–08	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11
Total	23,285	23,061	23,039	22,073

Source: July 2006 to June 2010 – Domestic Violence Line Hyperion Telephone System; July 2010 to June 2011 – Domestic Violence Line Interactive Insights Telephone System.

Calls to Domestic Violence Line by issue reported

VIOLENCE TYPE	NUMBER	%
Physical	6,812	29.0
Verbal	10,310	43.8
Sexual	674	2.9
Psychological	8,447	35.9
Social	3,043	12.9
Economic	2,229	9.5

Notes:

1 The percentages total more than 100 percent because there can be multiple violence types reported per call.

2 These data are based on calls recorded in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Source: Domestic Violence Line Database – July 2010 to June 2011.

A University of NSW qualitative study of women's experiences leaving violent relationships and their use of our services explored women's safety and housing experiences, and examines how services can enhance safety. The study concluded that most women were now living lives free from violence and that the support provided by our program had been a factor in achieving this.

This program is delivered in partnership with NSW Police, NSW Health, the Department of Attorney General and Justice and Housing NSW, as well as through more than 50 local partnership agreements with services including local women's refuges, courts, security firms, counselling services and family support.

FAMILIES NSW

Families NSW is a whole-of-government prevention and early intervention strategy that supports families expecting a child or with children up to eight years of age. Families NSW is provided jointly by FACS, NSW Health and the Department of Education and Communities, together with local government and community organisations.

We managed \$25.8 million of the Families NSW budget, funding 347 activities. NSW Health and the Department of Education and Communities are the other budget holders.

In 2010–11, through the Families NSW budget, we funded 114 supported playgroup services, providing 337 supported playgroups, 94 family workers, 48 community capacity-building projects, 54 partnerships and networks projects, 10 volunteer home visit services and 27 parenting programs.

Families NSW is currently undertaking a review of the family worker service model to inform a more consistent, structured approach to better support children and families accessing family worker services. The review will be completed in 2011.

The Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) continued to offer programs for families with children aged from three to eight years. This year, about 300 welfare, health and educational professionals were trained to deliver the program, bringing the total number of practitioners to 1,200 since Triple P began in 2008. A further 165 practitioners were trained in the Indigenous Triple P, bringing the total number to 213.

An evaluation of Triple P is currently underway and is expected to be completed by late 2011.

ABORIGINAL CHILD, YOUTH AND FAMILY STRATEGY

The Aboriginal Child, Youth and Family Strategy is a statewide prevention and early intervention strategy aimed at children aged up to five years, their families and communities.

This year, \$3.7 million funded 62 projects including Aboriginal parenting programs, school transition programs, supported playgroups, family workers and programs to build the capacity of the community to respond to challenges.

A further three parenting books – part of the 'Growing Up Strong' series – were developed to support Aboriginal parents and family workers in the Western and Metro West regions, bringing the total to 13 books.

ABORIGINAL CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRES

As part of the Indigenous Early Childhood Development National Partnership Agreement, nine new Aboriginal Child and Family Centres are being established to provide integrated services tailored to the needs of local Aboriginal families, including child care services and parent and family support services.

Service providers are already providing interim services in Mt Druitt and Ballina, with planning underway for interim services in Campbelltown.

A tender process was undertaken in 2010–11 for the final six locations: Blacktown, Toronto, Nowra, Brewarrina, Gunnedah and Lightning Ridge, with interim services in these locations expected to commence in late 2011.

Building stronger communities

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SPECIALIST HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

In January 2009, the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) replaced previously separate housing and homelessness agreements, including the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Agreement and the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement.

Specialist homelessness services are now funded in NSW under the NAHA and its associated National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) with matched funding from the NSW Government.

In 2010–11, the Commonwealth Government and Community Services jointly contributed \$133 million for 358 specialist homelessness services to provide accommodation and support to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including families in crisis, women and children affected by domestic violence, young people and single adults.

The most recent data¹ available indicate that these services assisted approximately 41,700 clients in their own right and a further 19,700 children and young people who accompanied their parents or carers.

The main reasons for seeking assistance were domestic or family violence, family or relationship breakdown, time-out needed from family, problematic substance abuse and financial difficulties.

Specialist homelessness services operate through a case management approach. Services provided include accommodation, general support (advice, advocacy, living skills, court support), personal support for families and relationships, financial and employment support and basic support (meals, showers and transport).

We are working with NGOs to implement the NSW Homelessness Action Plan and lead 32 projects targeting specific client groups – 20 of these are funded under the NPAH, with total funding of \$38.5 million from 2009 to 2013. These include projects aimed at:

- assisting Aboriginal young people leaving out-of-home care to successfully transition to independent living, preventing homelessness
- providing secure transitional housing and integrated support programs which focus on training, education and employment for young people with low to moderate needs

- reducing exits into homelessness for people with mental illness through coordinated discharge planning and links to long-term accommodation and support
- breaking the cycle of homelessness for chronically homeless adults through 'housing first' approaches
- providing intensive case management support for single men with complex needs in western NSW
- offering better access to rental assistance, as well as legal and medical services for chronically homeless people with complex needs in regional areas
- assisting families affected by domestic violence to remain in their homes through the Staying Home Leaving Violence Program.

During the year, four conferences were held for new services funded under the NPAH which are piloting new approaches to regional homelessness, domestic violence, rural tenancy support and youth homelessness.

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011. Government-funded specialist homelessness services: SAAP National Data Collection annual report 2009-10: New South Wales. Cat No HOU 240. Canberra: AIHW

Crisis Response team protects children



When emergencies happen outside business hours, Community Services' After Hours Crisis Response team is on hand to help protect children and families in NSW.

The Crisis Response team operates overnight and weekends 365 days a year to respond to urgent situations where a child is in danger.

This could be a result of neglect, homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse, mental illness, physical or sexual assault or domestic violence.

The team works closely with other government departments to ensure that children are protected at any time of the day or night. Commonly, caseworkers require police to be present when they go out after hours, particularly where there is a history of violence with a family or the information received suggests that the situation is likely to be volatile.

Director of the Child Protection Helpline, Jody Grima, said staff worked with families, professionals and the community to provide immediate support.

"In some cases that involves removing children from their carers to ensure their immediate safety.

"Our caseworkers are specialists in crisis intervention and work closely with NSW Health, NSW Police and other specialist services which operate after hours.

"Our priority is to meet the immediate needs of the child or young person until they can be connected with other specialist services the next business day," Jody said.

In 2010–11, the service received 9,739 referrals.

Some of the most common reports include children who are homeless, violence in the home or injuries to a child.

"Our priority is to meet the immediate needs of the child or young person until they can be connected with other specialist services the next business day."

Prevention and early intervention

We assist families in NSW by providing targeted support for vulnerable families and investing in early childhood services. Our early intervention strategies help families who are struggling and prevent problems from escalating.

Our children's services give children the best possible start in life by preparing them for school years and encouraging life-long social and educational skills. Significant work is underway to stabilise and reduce the number of children entering care through a range of early intervention and prevention and restoration initiatives.

EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

Early intervention programs aim to support children's age-appropriate development without ongoing involvement in the child protection system. A significant proportion of the five-year Keep Them Safe funding package is being invested in government and non-government prevention and early intervention services. This includes \$4.3 million in early intervention funding for support services for children, young people and their families in 2010–11 and funding to expand Brighter Futures placements and expand intensive family support and family preservation services for children most at risk of entering out-of-home care.

BRIGHTER FUTURES

Brighter Futures services are provided to more than 3,500 families with children under nine years of age who are vulnerable to domestic violence, parental drug and alcohol misuse and/or mental health issues and child behaviour management problems.

This year, Brighter Futures provided more than \$51 million in funding to 16 lead NGOs to provide case management, structured home visits, group parenting programs and quality children's services to client families. An additional \$9.2 million per year was provided for additional places under Brighter Futures from January 2011.

Brighter Futures provision includes:

- 3,124 families to receive case management from lead agencies (including 962 places for Aboriginal families and 542 for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families)
- 1,396 children to receive two days per week in quality children's services.

In September 2010, a Brighter Futures evaluation report completed by the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of NSW was published. The evaluation supported continuation of the Brighter Futures Program through joint service delivery by both government departments and non-government organisations.

The evaluation showed that families with children at risk who participated in the program were less likely to re-enter the child protection system and be the subject of a report and were also less likely to enter out-of-home care or else time in out-of-home care was reduced.

The Early Intervention Council (formerly Brighter Futures Council), consisting of NGOs, us and other government representatives, was established in January 2011 to oversee and advise on the implementation of the Brighter Futures reforms.

In 2011, reforms have included the redesign of referral pathways to reduce access times and improve targeting of the program and an improved response to address vulnerabilities like domestic violence, and parental drug, alcohol and mental health issues.

On 30 June 2011, the NSW Government announced \$10 million in funding to expand the role of the non-government sector in the delivery of early intervention services. Early intervention services to high-risk families will be provided through the Stronger Families Program to prevent needs escalating.

More than 100 Aboriginal families are participating in the Brighter Futures Aboriginal Families Study, which will provide evidence of how Aboriginal families benefit from participating in the program and information to further improve the program. The report is due at the end of 2011.

Families and children and young people participating in Brighter Futures as at 30 June 2011

MANAGING ORGANISATION	REFERRAL PATHWAY	FAMILIES		CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE	
		NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%
NSW Community Services	Helpline referral	1,079	32.8	2,520	32.1
NGOs	Helpline referral	689	20.9	1,609	20.5
	Community referral	1,523	46.2	3,711	47.3
Transition	Helpline referral	2	0.1	5	0.1
Total		3,293	100	7,845	100

Source: KiDS – Corporate Information Warehouse annual data.
Produced by: NSW Community Services, Information Management Branch.

Families and children and young people participating in Brighter Futures by Aboriginal status as at 30 June 2011

ABORIGINAL STATUS	FAMILIES		CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE	
	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	861	26.1	2,189	27.9
Non-Aboriginal	2,432	73.9	5,656	72.1
Total	3,293	100	7,845	100

Source: KiDS – Corporate Information Warehouse annual data.
Produced by: NSW Community Services, Information Management Branch.

EARLY INTERVENTION AND PLACEMENT PREVENTION

During the year, services funded under the Community Services Grants Program were re-aligned to form part of a new program called the Early Intervention and Placement Prevention (EIPP) Program.

Four hundred and thirty services funded under the EIPP Program will form part of an integrated system of funded early intervention and placement prevention services aimed at reducing the likelihood of children and young people entering or remaining in the child protection and out-of-home care systems.

Following a tender process, new early intervention and placement prevention funding of \$11.2 million was allocated to 117 service providers for a total of 130 expanded and new services including:

- \$4.3 million for 80 expanded early intervention services for children, young people and their families
- \$3.4 million for 32 new intensive family support services
- \$3.4 million for 18 new intensive family preservation services.

One-off funding of \$5.5 million was provided to assist services moving to the new models and to implement performance-based contracting.

Around 2,000 people attended meetings held at 20 key regional centres during August and September 2010 to explain the transition to new funding arrangements.

From 2011–12, the EIPP Program will have an annual ongoing budget of \$64.2 million. This includes the additional \$11.2 million made available through Keep Them Safe and \$5.5 million provided to 26 services including child sexual assault clinics and domestic violence services.

We continued to work with NGOs through the Keeping It Together project, a change management initiative to support organisations impacted by the reform. In 2010–11, \$602,000 were provided to three peak organisations: NSW Family Services, the Youth Action and Policy Association and the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies, to provide a comprehensive range of services.

Prevention and early intervention

CONTINUED

CHILDREN'S SERVICES¹

In 2010–11, we regulated nearly 3,500 children's services across NSW and supported better access to these services. Improvements to the regulatory system now promote greater compliance with regulatory standards and ensure that licence applications are processed more efficiently.

In 2010–11, \$173 million were provided to children's services including preschool, long day care, occasional and vacation care and early childhood services. Not-for-profit preschools were provided around \$130 million in funding.

Children's services funding was delivered to about 1,500 services operated by local councils, shires and NGOs including:

- \$130 million for preschool services
- \$15.9 million for long day care services
- \$4 million for occasional care services
- \$2.8 million for vacation care services
- \$6.8 million for early childhood services
- \$13.1 million for children with additional needs to access children's services.

We continued to work towards a new national approach to the regulation of early childhood education and outside school hours care by:

- the *Children (Education and Care Services National Law Application) Act* passing through NSW Parliament in November 2010
- a national trial of the new assessment and rating process in late 2010, with 50 services participating
- amendments to the *NSW Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act* and *Children's Services Regulation*, providing for a smoother transition to the new national system, from January 2011
- public consultation on draft Education and Care Services National Regulations in March and April 2011, with 10 consultation forums held across NSW
- the multilateral implementation plan for the National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care signed by the Premier in May 2011.

Changes to the Act and the Regulation have cut red tape for providers of children's services by introducing a single licence system, allowing a licence to be issued without a fixed term and replacing licence variations.

The National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care provides a unified national approach to the regulation of early childhood education and care and outside school hours care from January 2012.

The National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education and Care aims to significantly increase the level of access to preschool programs by 2013. In 2010–11, it delivered a further \$26.9 million in funding in NSW on top of existing NSW Government commitments, totalling nearly \$130 million. The partnership resulted in higher funding allocations to approximately 665 preschools across NSW and has had a direct impact on affordability and participation rates for Aboriginal children and children from low income families.

In 2010–11, almost 1,500 children's services projects were funded – about 42,978 funded places per day across mobile services, long day care, preschools, occasional care, multipurpose centres, toy libraries, support services and resource groups.

Licensing of school-based children's services continued, with assessment of more than 45 applications for school-based licences and 30 premises inspected.

This year, 258 new outside school hours services were registered, with 3,262 services providing before and after school care and vacation care as at 30 June 2011.

¹ Children's services were transferred to the Department of Education and Communities on 4 April 2011.

Licensed children's services

SERVICES	2007-08		2008-09		2009-10		2010-11	
	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%
Family day care	103	3.0	99	2.9	100	2.9	103	2.9
Home-based services	116	3.4	90	2.6	87	2.5	65	1.9
Mobile services	12	0.4	14	0.4	27	0.8	26	0.7
Centre-based services	1,909	55.8	1,964	57.1	1,983	57.4	2,056	58.4
Funded centre-based services	1,210	35.4	1,191	34.6	1,163	33.7	1,176	33.5
Funded mobile services	48	1.4	46	1.3	37	1.1	36	1.0
School-based services	21	0.6	36	1.0	55	1.6	55	1.6
Total	3,419	100	3,440	100	3,452	100	3,517	100
Estimated total licensed capacity (places per day)	150,776		154,351		135,238 ¹		146,795	

Note:

1 The NSW Government Licensing System introduced in 2009-10 does not capture information about the capacity of each family day care scheme. This is because the *NSW Children's Services Regulation 2004* does not require this information as part of a scheme's approval, or on an ongoing basis. Therefore the capacity of family day care schemes has been excluded from the estimated total "licensed" capacity. However, indicative figures from previous years indicate that there are approximately 3,700 family day carers registered with family day care schemes across NSW, and each carer can offer care to up to seven children, giving an estimated total of up to 25,900 places per day.

Therefore, data for 2009-10 are not directly comparable to those of previous years.

Source: Children's Services Information System Annual Statistical Extract 2010-11.

Funded children's services

SERVICES	2007-08		2008-09		2009-10		2010-11	
	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%
Centre-based services	1,210	75.2	1,191	75.2	1,163	75.9	1,176	81.0
Mobile services	69	4.3	67	4.2	37	2.4	36	2.3
Vacation care	246	15.3	242	15.3	244	15.9	166	11.1
Early childhood services	84	5.2	83	5.2	88	5.7	84	5.6
Total	1,609	100	1,583	100	1,532	100	1,462	100
Estimated total licensed/funded capacity (places per day) ¹	45,957		45,477		45,342		42,978	

Note:

1 Vacation care and early childhood services are not recorded on the information system as having a licensed capacity, because these service types are not licensed.

Source: Children's Services Information System Annual Statistical Extract 2010-11.

Prevention and early intervention

CONTINUED

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed National Quality Framework is scheduled to apply to all long day care, family day care, preschool and outside school hours care services from 1 January 2012. The framework aims to improve the quality of services provided to children, improve information provided to parents about the quality and rating of services and help streamline regulation and quality assessment systems across Australia.

On 1 January 2011, a 1:4 staff-to-child ratio was introduced for children aged under two years in centre-based and mobile services in NSW. This new ratio was introduced along with other changes to the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act* and *Children's Services Regulation* aimed at reducing administration, increasing operational flexibility for service providers and providing a smoother transition to the National Quality Framework.

Children's Services worked with service providers to improve and increase knowledge and awareness about the *Children's Services Regulation*, including procedures to support the safety and wellbeing of children attending services, such as accurate recording of children's daily arrival and departure.

The centralised Children's Services telephone and email inquiry service recorded an average of 73 calls and 22 emails a day and provided a point of contact for members of the public and licensed providers with questions.

The children's services sector was informed about regulatory

changes and policy reforms through online updates, letters and a quarterly newsletter.

In February 2011, the Children's Services IT system was improved, providing a more sophisticated way of recording and reporting on compliance activities and outcomes.

In 2010–11, prosecutions were taken against five defendants representing four children's services for a total of 14 offences. This resulted in the court awarding \$39,500 in penalties. Information about all convictions is available at www.community.nsw.gov.au

The preschool investment and reform plan is creating an additional 5,250 new preschool places for an extra 10,500 children and aims for all children in NSW to attend preschool for two days a week in the year before they start school, with the NSW Government committing \$29.8 million to services.

Community Child Care Co-operative and CareWest now provide development and support services to preschools to help increase places – 2,507 spots have been established, with plans for a further 6,738 places approved.

A higher rate of funding is given to services with children from low-income Aboriginal and CALD families and those in remote or disadvantaged areas. This has resulted in significant increases in preschool participation by Aboriginal children and children from low-income families.

In 2010–11, \$13.1 million were invested through Supporting Children with Additional Needs to help children with special needs access preschool, vacation care and occasional care services. This funding provided support for children with an identified disability or with an Aboriginal or CALD background.

My job can be challenging at times, but I love the fact I'm making a big difference by acting quickly in difficult situations. It's great knowing that we help children, young people and families by always providing a high quality service, no matter the time of day or night!!

– Melissa, Crisis Response team caseworker

Children 0–5 years in NSW accessing funded licensed children’s services

	2007–08	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11
All children				
No. of children 0–5 years attending funded licensed children’s services in NSW	66,797	87,470	86,222	93,502
Total NSW population 0–5 years	525,836	526,720	544,533	594,871
Children 0–5 years in NSW accessing funded licensed children’s services	12.7%	16.6%	15.8%	15.7%
Aboriginal children				
No. of Aboriginal children 0–5 years attending funded licensed children’s services in NSW	3,181	3,649	4,179	4,410
Total NSW Aboriginal population 0–5 years	20,755	20,755	20,755	20,755
Aboriginal children 0–5 years in NSW accessing funded licensed children’s services	15.3%	17.6%	20.1%	25.1%
CALD children				
No. of CALD children 0–5 years attending funded licensed children’s services in NSW.	12,341	11,756	12,362	12,948
Total NSW CALD population 0–5 years	113,318	111,611	111,611	111,611
CALD children 0–5 years in NSW accessing funded licensed children’s services	10.9%	10.5%	11.1%	11.6%

Source: Children’s Services Information System Annual Statistical Extract, Information Management Branch. ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing, ERP June 2010.

Note: Prior to 2010–11, information relates to children aged 0 to 5 years attending funded licensed children’s services during one survey week in August each year. In 2010–11, survey data are based on a representative fortnight.

Number of children with special needs accessing funded licensed services¹

	2007	2008	2009	2010
No. of children from low-income families for whom fees were reduced ²	11,617	23,978	25,543	24,547
No. of children from special needs group ³				
Aboriginal children	3,181	3,649	4,179	4,410
Children from cultural and linguistically diverse (CALD) background	12,341	11,756	12,362	12,948
Children with a disability	5,218	4,642	4,492	5,057

Notes:

1 Prior to 2010–11, information relates to children aged 0–5 attending funded licensed children’s services during one survey week in August each year. In 2010–11, survey data is based on a representative fortnight.

2 The definition of low-income families was revised in 2008. Low-income families are now defined as those who have a Health Care card. Previous annual data on low-income families are not directly comparable with 2008 and subsequent years.

3 These categories are not mutually exclusive.

Source: Children’s Services Information System Annual Statistical Extract 2010–11.

Keeping children safe

In NSW, the safety and wellbeing of children and young people is a shared responsibility across the government, the non-government sector, parents and community, allowing caseworkers to concentrate on the most serious child protection cases.

Statutory child protection aims to ensure that children and young people are safe following intervention. Significant changes to the child protection system have shifted the way mandatory reporters assess and report child protection concerns, and this is addressing the high level of reporting to the 24-hour Child Protection Helpline.

Caseworkers are assisted by NSW Police, NSW Health and other agencies and handle the most serious cases of abuse and neglect. The response may include intensive casework and referral to support services such as counselling or family therapy. Children and young people may need foster or relative care to keep them safe from harm.

STATUTORY CHILD PROTECTION

Child Protection Helpline reports are assessed to determine if they reach the statutory reporting level of risk of significant harm (ROSH) to the child or young person and then assigned a priority response level and forwarded to the local Community Services Centre (CSC) or Joint Investigation Response Team (JIRT) for action. Any immediate threat to safety is addressed.

In 2010–11, 215,272 reports were received from mandatory reporters such as police, teachers, child care and health workers, as well as from the general public.

This was a reduction of 15.9 percent, reflecting changes to the reporting threshold.

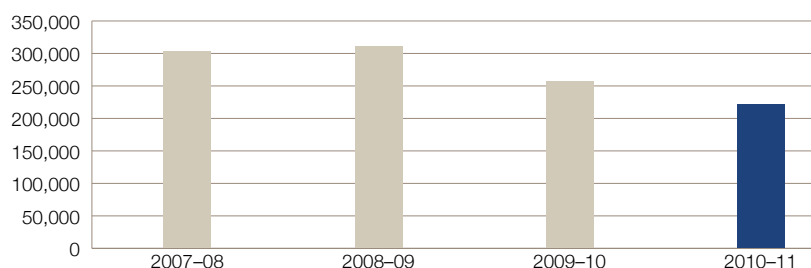
The new higher ROSH statutory reporting threshold introduced in January 2010 means that only children deemed at risk of significant harm are required to be reported to Community Services. Where the risk falls below this threshold, government and NGOs are supported to work with vulnerable children, young people and their families, including arranging suitable referrals to address issues of concern.

Aboriginal children and young people are still over-represented,

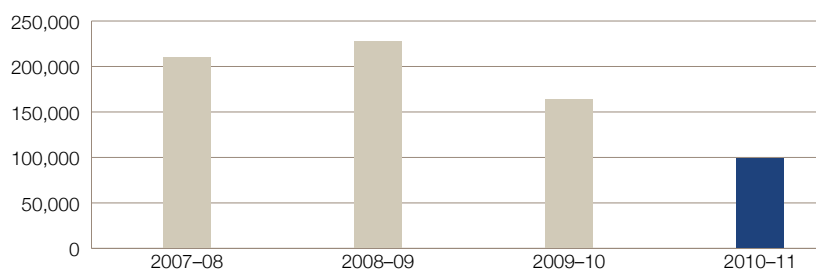
with domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse remaining key risk factors identified in reports. Infants under one year old are also more likely to be the subject of a report.

The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children is a 12-year (2009–20) reform program that recognises the need for a national approach to child protection. Both Keep Them Safe and the National Framework focus on the importance of early identification of the needs of vulnerable children and families and the importance of early intervention through universal and targeted services.

Child protection/child and young person concern reports



Child protection reports referred for further assessment/ROSH report



Children and young people who were the subject of a report referred for further assessment/ROSH report

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Rate per 1,000 children and young people who were the subject of a report requiring further assessment	65.7	71.1	55.4	37.3

Source: Corporate Information Warehouse annual data, Information Management Branch.

In line with these national priorities and as part of the Common Approach to Assessment, Referral and Support Taskforce, we have been working with the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth and the Commonwealth. We are developing a common approach to assessment, referral and support to improve early identification of needs of at-risk children and their families by universal and secondary prevention services and to better promote timely referrals and shared responsibility.

This initiative is one of 12 national priorities planned during the first three-year period of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children. A 12-month trial of the common assessment approach at four sites nationally will include the Interrelate Family Centre in Lismore, a not-for-profit family relationship and counselling provider. The trial is expected to begin later this year.

INTAKE AND ASSESSMENT

The Community Services Child Protection Helpline provides a 24-hour, seven days a week system for receiving reports about children and young people who may be at risk of significant harm due to physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect. Members of the community, together with mandatory reporters, can make these reports. In 2010–11, the helpline handled over 166,700 contacts (calls, faxes and eReports), with calls answered within an average of three minutes and 49 seconds. The helpline has a set target to answer calls within an average of three minutes.

Helpline caseworkers assess information to determine whether the matter reaches the threshold of at risk of significant harm, record the issues and apply the criteria in *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act*

1998, s. 23. Information is entered onto KiDS, our client information system. More than 45 percent of reports were ROSH reports referred for further assessment.

The helpline aims to send feedback letters (usually by email) to all mandatory reporters within 72 hours of receiving a report – regardless of whether a report meets the risk of significant harm threshold or not. The reporter then knows if the child or young person and their family have been referred to a caseworker at a CSC, or if they need to offer appropriate referrals and alternative support.

A total of 7,480 reports were made via the eReporting system compared to 1,821 reports received in 2009–10. eReporting allows reporting of non-imminent risks through a secure website. Online reporting is now available to staff at public and Catholic Education schools, NSW Police, NSW Health, Juvenile Justice and FACS.

The helpline's After Hours Crisis Response team specialises in emergency intervention to families who are in crisis situations after hours. In 2010–11, the team received 9,739 referrals – an increase of 33 percent from 2009–10.

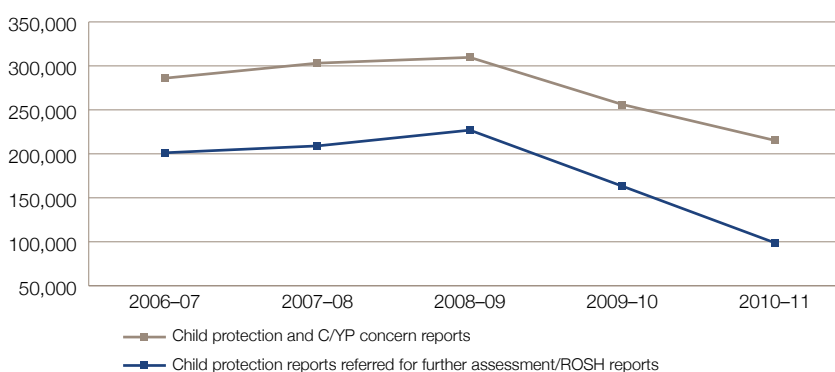
JOINT INVESTIGATION RESPONSE TEAMS

Joint Investigation Response Teams (JIRTs) investigate child abuse reports that may involve a criminal offence, bringing together professionals from Community Services, NSW Police and NSW Health. The teams link the risk assessment and protective intervention of caseworkers with the criminal investigation powers of police and diagnostic or therapeutic services of health workers. This means that children receive an integrated service and do not need to recount their experiences repeatedly to different agencies.

In 2010–11, 4,249 child protection reports were referred to these teams – 29 percent in metropolitan areas and 71 percent in regional/rural areas.

The JIRT Referral Unit (JRU) is the central intake unit for acceptance of referrals into the JIRT program. The JRU is staffed by representatives of the three agencies, and together managers assess each referral against JIRT criteria. This process frees up local JIRT units to focus on protective and investigative intervention.

Risk of significant harm (ROSH) reports



Source: KiDS – Corporate Information Warehouse annual data.

Produced by: NSW Community Services, Information Management Branch.

Keeping children safe

CONTINUED

Local planning and response procedures were implemented across all JIRT locations to provide a systematic and well coordinated response to each child or young person requiring a JIRT intervention.

This year, an audit of JIRT cases examined agency coordination and information sharing in line with Keep Them Safe recommendations and principles to support improvements in interagency responses to serious concerns about children and young people.

FAMILY CASE MANAGEMENT

During the year, more than 77 families participated in the interagency Family Case Management pilot, which assists children and families where at least one child or young person is at risk of harm and likely to be frequently encountered by government departments and non-government organisations providing multiple services.

We worked with NSW Health to develop a new model of care. Keep Them Safe Whole Family teams have begun working with families, carers and children where carers have mental health and/or drug and alcohol problems and parenting difficulties and there are child protection concerns. Pilot services are underway in Gosford, Peninsula, Wyong, Lakes, Charlestown, Nowra and Lismore.

JIRT referrals

	NUMBER OF REFERRALS ACCEPTED
Sydney JIRTs	1,562
Non-Sydney JIRTs	2,687
Total	4,249

Source: JIRT Referral Unit Database, 2010–11.

ABORIGINAL CHILD PROTECTION

Protecting Aboriginal Children Together (PACT) is a new Aboriginal child protection consultation model being piloted in NSW to find better ways of keeping Aboriginal children safe. In partnership with the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec), we conducted extensive consultation with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peaks to establish an agreed service model for NSW, based on the Victorian Lakidjeka service.

PACT services focus on practical ways of working with Aboriginal communities and organisations to determine the best ways of keeping Aboriginal children safe.

Service provision guidelines are being finalised along with training for Aboriginal NGOs and our own staff. Pius X Aboriginal Corporation at Moree and Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation at Shellharbour will commence operation later in the year.

More than 154 children took part in services or received support from an Aboriginal Intensive Family Based Service (IFBS) in 2010–11. These services provide a time-limited, home-based support program for Aboriginal families where children are at risk of entering OOHC, or are in care with a restoration plan in place.

There are now nine Community Services-managed IFBS sites at Newcastle, Mt Druitt, Redfern, Casino, Dapto, Campbelltown, Bourke, Kempsey and Wyong, with four more to be established and managed by Aboriginal NGOs over the next five years in areas where there are high numbers of child protection reports involving Aboriginal children and young people.

Community engagement guidelines help to ensure that services work with families in a consistent way and referral e-form procedures are incorporated into KiDS to assist casework for Aboriginal children and families.

Aboriginal families also have a dedicated referral pathway into the Brighter Futures early intervention program. Vulnerable families referred by the NSW Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Health Strategy are also given priority access to early intervention support through the Brighter Futures Program.

Work continued with Aboriginal Affairs NSW to carry out the Safe Families program, which is part of the Interagency Plan to Tackle Child Sexual Assault in Aboriginal Communities 2006–11 and aims to tackle Aboriginal child sexual assault through community development, child protection, early intervention and prevention and risk reduction strategies. Our caseworkers are key team members along with health workers and community engagement officers.

IMPROVING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Policies updated during the year included the Sibling Safety Policy (March 2011) and Responding to Prenatal Reports Policy (updated June 2011 in conjunction with NSW Health).

We are also leading the development of Child Wellbeing and Child Protection – NSW Interagency Guidelines, which provide information and guidance to all organisations involved in the delivery of child wellbeing and child protection services. The guidelines are being updated with new sections on engaging children, young people and families, a guide to court processes involving children and young people, roles and responsibilities and prevention and early intervention strategies.

A second edition of the Mandatory Reporter Guide was published in December 2010, with further improvements to be incorporated into a revised third edition expected later in 2011.

Practice procedures for caseworkers are regularly reviewed, updated and published online. During the year, work began to make procedures, tools and forms more accessible and readable online.

Structured Decision Making® (SDM) tools have been introduced to promote consistency in decision-making when reporting, screening or assessing child protection concerns.

A trial of the Safety, Risk Assessment and Risk Re-assessment Tools was conducted in the second half of 2010, and a casework manual was revised for the staggered statewide implementation of the tools, which started at the end of 2010–11.

Six-month trials of both the SDM Family Strengths and Needs Assessment (to assist in case plan development) and the Restoration Assessment Tools (used to structure critical case management decisions regarding restoration of children and young people in statutory care) were undertaken, with a review to be completed in 2011–12.

Carer and Placement Support Assessment Tools assess the ability of an authorised carer to meet specific child needs and the need for additional support, training and/or monitoring and the safety of a child at the time of placement. Customisation of these tools is underway and will be considered for trial in the context of the transfer of out-of-home care to the non-government sector.

During the year, work focused on strengthening interagency collaboration and building partnerships with local services and agencies, implementing Keep Them Safe changes, improving regional business planning and meeting goals outlined in Regional Commitment of Service Plans.

Regional quality councils help to drive continual practice improvement through monthly or bi-monthly meetings, while a range of projects and pilots helped improve local responses to child protection and out-of-home care.

An extra consultancy position was created to support Aboriginal caseworkers at Intensive Family Based Services. New drug and alcohol and domestic violence intranet sites for frontline staff were also introduced. This service will also be offered to NGOs providing new Aboriginal intensive family-based support.

During the year, 24 Community Service Centres participated in reviews which look at the way they function across their workforce, systems, culture and practice. CSCs have development plans which guide improvements in key areas, as well as strengthening general service and function of the centres.

Casework Specialist Services continued to provide direct practice support to field staff through group and individual coaching, case practice reviews and consultations, with new recruits undertaking the Caseworker Development Program.

Practice solution sessions for all casework staff are held weekly to address topics like legislative changes, information exchange, mandatory reporting guidelines and supported care.

Improved information sharing between states and territories is assisting in the prevention of child abuse and neglect and in the support provided to victims and their families. This initiative is one of 12 national priorities under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–20. The agreements with Medicare Australia and Centrelink enable our staff to obtain information regarding the health status of children, young people and their families. A similar protocol with the Child Support Agency will begin in late 2011. Discussions about the protocol have also begun with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

Keeping children safe

CONTINUED

During the year, we played an active role in changes to Children's Court procedures and processes which included simplifying procedures for bringing care applications and providing all relevant information, in the early stages of proceedings, to the court and other parties.

As part of a working group with other legal stakeholders and the Children's Court Clinic, we also helped to simplify and standardise terms used in an assessment order made by the Children's Court.

Work continued with the Family Court of Australia in implementing Project Magellan in NSW. Project Magellan continues to help in child protection cases where allegations of serious physical or sexual abuse are raised during Family Court proceedings, with work underway to extend the boundaries of the project. Project Magellan, a partnership between us, the Family Court of Australia, Legal Aid, the Law Society and NSW Police, operates from the Sydney, Parramatta and Newcastle Registries of the Family Court of Australia and in all CSCs in the Sydney metropolitan area, plus the Hunter and the Central Coast.

Staff were encouraged to make greater use of warrants when removing children at immediate risk of serious harm, while other work focused on simplifying the application process and prioritising applications for warrants under the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act*.

The Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW recommended a review of the power of the Children's Court to make contact orders in matters where there is no realistic possibility of restoration to the parents. Following the work done by an expert working party, a number of consultations took place and an issues paper will inform further discussions.

ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

During the year, we contributed to, and in some cases led, the development and trial of a number of alternative dispute resolution pilots and trials across NSW in response to recommendations from the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW to explore alternatives to contested court proceedings. As part of the focus on alternative dispute resolution, legal officers have completed training in alternative dispute resolution.

Pilots and trials underway include:

- dispute resolution conferences introduced in February 2011 across NSW
- a trial of family group conferencing in Sydney and the far north coast, aimed at diverting the case from future proceedings, with an evaluation due in late 2011
- a court-referred external mediation pilot being trialled at Bidura, led by Legal Aid and to be evaluated in late 2011.

We continued to work with the Department of Attorney General and Justice, Legal Aid and the Children's Court to pilot the Aboriginal Care Circle Project in Nowra to better meet the needs of Aboriginal families in the Children's Court system by allowing community involvement to inform decision-making around care orders.

During the year, six families participated in nine care circles which use different dispute resolution to engage Aboriginal families where a finding has been made that the child or young person is in need of care and protection. An evaluation of the Care Circle Project reinforced the project's value and cultural relevance to Aboriginal families. Planning is underway to extend the project to Lismore.

Supporting children in care

Children who experience serious neglect and abuse and who can't live at home safely and children whose families might be unable to care for them are placed in out-of-home care (OOHC). This may be with relatives (kinship care) or foster parents, or sometimes in residential care or independent living arrangements.

The decision to remove a child is not an easy one, and we must have sufficient evidence to satisfy the Children's Court.

We are working with the non-government sector to improve outcomes for children and young people in care and to create a stronger service system with the right mix of services at a cost that is sustainable. Work is also underway for the transfer of OOHC service provision to NGOs in line with the recommendations of the Special Commission of Inquiry.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE

Children and young people in care do best in well-functioning and stable placements where their education, health, social, cultural and emotional needs are met. We aim to ensure maximum use of permanency planning provisions so children and young people have long-term stability when they cannot live at home.

A key focus is to ensure that children are developing well with quality care and support. This is done through a range of placement options including foster care, kinship care and residential care, as well as through carer support and in partnership with education and health organisations.

Children and young people in out-of-home care as at 30 June each year

	2008	2009	2010	2011
No. of children	14,667	16,524	17,400	17,896
Rate per 1,000 children and young people	9.1	10.2	10.7	10.9

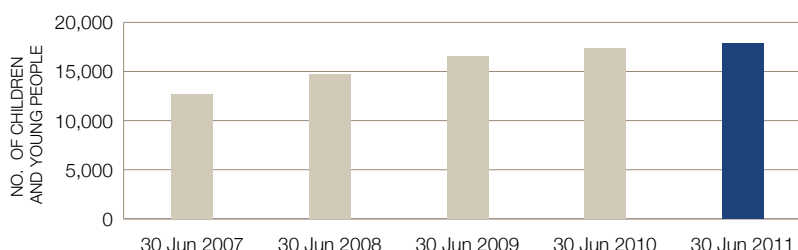
Source: 1 KiDS Corporate Information Warehouse annual data.
 2 ABS ERP NSW by age and sex as at 30 June 2007–10.
 3 ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing, NSW LGA.
 Produced by: Information Management branch.

Actual annual expenditure per child in out-of-home care

	2007–08	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11
Annual actual expenditure (\$'000)*	463,890	552,449	641,519	700,561
Cost per child in out-of-home care at 30 June (\$)	31,628	33,433	36,869	39,146

* This figure is not adjusted for inflation to real dollars.
 Source: 1 Financial data collection, Finance and Administrative Services.
 2 KiDS/MDS – Corporate Information Warehouse annual data.
 Produced by: Information Management branch.

Children and young people in out-of-home care



Source: KiDS/MDS – Corporate Information Warehouse annual data.
 Produced by: NSW Community Services, Information Management branch.

Most children in care are placed in relative or kinship care, or general foster care. Those with complex support needs may require a higher level of care through an intensive foster care service or residential service.

Along with NGOs and other government agencies, we provide a range of services and support including assessing the needs of children, monitoring and reviewing placements, assessing, training, authorising and supporting

carers, and providing kinship and foster care, residential care and adoption services.

As at 30 June 2011, there were 17,896 children and young people in OOHC – an increase of 2.9 percent since 30 June 2010. Aboriginal children represent 33.9 percent of children and young people in care.

Supporting children in care

CONTINUED

We aim to place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with extended family or members of the wider Aboriginal community so they can maintain their culture, in line with the legislative Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles.

During the year, more than 81.3 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care were placed with a relative or Aboriginal carer as at 30 June 2011.

An issues paper on strategies to increase the use of sole parental responsibility orders in NSW was released for consultation with non-government stakeholders. Responses to the issues paper are now being considered. Sole parental responsibility orders are a permanency planning option that may suit some children and young people in out-of-home care better than adoption or long-term foster care.

REFORMING OUT-OF-HOME CARE

Key reforms aim to improve the outcomes for children and young people entering and remaining in care by creating a stronger mix of sustainable out-of-home care services.

Where safety is not an issue, strengthening and expanding early intervention services and supporting restoration through programs such as family supervision arrangements will reduce the number of children who enter and remain in OOHC.

Transferring case management to NGOs funded by us is a key strategy to promoting a sustainable out-of-home care system, with a focus on better health, education and wellbeing

outcomes for children in care. Currently, more than 1,200 children and young people are case managed by NGOs.

In line with the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW the government is committed to the transition of OOHC to the non-government sector. This transfer needs to occur in a way that is beneficial for children and young people and sustainable for the NGO sector and the government.

To inform this process, a joint non-government and government Ministerial Advisory Group was announced to help guide the transfer of OOHC services to the NGO sector. The Ministerial Advisory Group will be co-chaired by the Chief Executive of the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) and the Director General of FACS.

An intergovernmental OOHC Taskforce was also established to support improvements in contractual arrangements and held its first meeting in June 2011.

In 2010–11, contract reform work progressed to ensure payments to NGOs better reflect service use. The NGO Contract Reform Consultative Group considered the way general foster care and residential costing models are developed and applied both now and into the future, compared costs to manage out-of-home care placements and further reviewed caseload benchmarks in out-of-home care and a common assessment tool for children entering care in NSW.

A caseload benchmark project helped define and establish benchmark caseloads for statutory and supported care. Benchmarks for OOHC unit costs were

developed for service models, and a forecasting model was developed for updating cost forward estimates in out-of-home care.

The OOHC Taskforce will guide further work on OOHC contractual arrangements. The Ministerial Advisory Group will guide further work on how the OOHC system can be reformed to better support children and young people.

In partnership with AbSec, work continued on the Aboriginal OOHC Service Capacity-building Initiative to help Aboriginal organisations become effective and sustainable providers of OOHC for Aboriginal children and young people.

In 2010–11, six of the seven organisations continued to receive more funding under the three-year strategy which began in 2007–08 and which aims to double the number of OOHC placements for Aboriginal children and young people in NSW. In September 2010, the seventh organisation was approved for growth funding for case management.

In 2010, work began to support existing Aboriginal organisations not currently providing OOHC to become OOHC service providers in the future.

Four Aboriginal NGOs will receive funding of up to \$3.2 million over two years to provide family preservation and foster care recruitment and support services. During the two years, each of the NGOs will be working to gain OOHC accreditation through the Office of the Children's Guardian.

ACCREDITATION, STANDARDS AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

In December 2010, Community and Disability Services Ministers across Australia endorsed a set of 13 National Standards for OOHC that will be gradually implemented from July 2011, with the first public reporting in 2012. These standards also form the 12 national priorities planned during the first three-year period under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–20. These standards will help to ensure that children and young people are provided with a consistent standard of care, regardless of where they live in Australia, as well as put in place a nationally consistent data collection and reporting framework. By 2015, there will be 22 measures reporting against the full set of national standards.

Accreditation for providers of OOHC (following the end of the current accreditation to 2013) requires practice improvements assessed against standards through annual progress reports and participation in case file audits. We continue to participate in the Children's Guardian Accreditation and Quality Improvement Program. The Guardian assesses our progress against the NSW Standards for Statutory Out-of-Home Care.

Based on audit results and feedback from the Children's Guardian, a case planning framework, procedure and case plan template have been developed to support staff capacity to meet case planning requirements established by the standards. Staff training in case planning requirements is expected to begin in July 2011.

A review of out-of-home care policies and procedures was completed in 2010 and work

began on streamlining the procedures. Strategies to improve practice around relative and kinship carer assessment, training and support are being developed.

During the year, 50 Community Service Centres were briefed in preparation for the 2011–12 audit process and caseworkers were assisted during on-site assessment visits by the Children's Guardian.

A behaviour and needs assessment tool is being trialled to assess the factors which determine the level of care to best meet the needs of a child or young person entering out-of-home care. This tool will improve the transparency, consistency and cost effectiveness of placement decisions, as well as improve matching placements with the specific needs of a child or young person. Reaching agreement on a common framework for making placement decisions is an important milestone in transitioning out-of-home care to the NGO sector. The tool was being trialled from July to September 2011 and is expected to be introduced in 2012.

During the year, a policy proposal was drafted for assisting unaccompanied children under 16 years who are in a specialist homelessness service, regarding the type of assistance provided by us to these children and young people.

SUPPORTING CARERS

In 2010–11, we recruited, assessed, trained and authorised 328 new foster carers.

Carerlink, a web-based application designed to help process all foster care applications, allows people to apply online at a time that suits them. During the year, Carerlink's operation was strengthened with new online training and support to new and existing Carerlink users.

A toll-free number allows potential applicants to speak to

someone about the process of applying and find out more about what it means to be a carer.

The Fostering NSW campaign, run in partnership with peaks and 22 non-government foster care organisations, launched in April 2010 to drive potential new carers to the Fostering NSW website www.fosteringnsw.com.au. As at 30 June 2011, there were 18,091 visits to the website and 1,767 calls to the call centre – 1800 2 Foster. Plans are underway with ACWA, which will continue this campaign work.

Foster care recruitment resources are available to Aboriginal, Greek, Vietnamese and Arabic communities. Three foster carer recruitment initiatives targeting the Arabic-speaking, African and Greek communities began in November 2010. An evaluation is due in late 2011. Our work includes strategies to support ongoing recruitment of Aboriginal carers and carers for children with a disability.

The carer recruitment project leadership group provides coordination and direction on recruitment and authorisation of foster carers with membership including ACWA and AbSec.

Improving support for carers strengthens the quality and stability of placements and supports better life outcomes for children and young people in their care. Children in care who have experienced serious abuse and neglect face incredible challenges and often need tailored support services to meet their needs.

This year, significant work took place to improve support and training for foster and kinship carers and encourage increased participation in carer peer support groups. Work also focused on supporting Aboriginal kinship and foster carers and improving their access to support, especially for carers in remote and regional communities.

Supporting children in care

CONTINUED

We fund and work with AbSec, Connecting Carers NSW, Link Up and CREATE to deliver tangible support, training, counselling, advocacy, resources and advice to more than 4,000 carer families across NSW.

Connecting Carers NSW offers structured peer support, training and network activities, as well as a 24-hour telephone support line for carers.

Foster care advisory groups in all regions continue to give foster carers and staff an opportunity to talk through issues and strengthen support and partnership.

This year, support initiatives included:

- publishing 'Caring for kids – a guide for foster, relative and kinship carers', a new resource providing information for carers about their roles, responsibilities, entitlements and relevant policies
- a new carer information sheet to enable staff to provide localised contacts and support information as well as the Support For You brochure available online
- a one-day statewide meeting of Regional Foster Care Advisory Group (RFCAG) representatives in June 2011, bringing together 60 representatives to share and discuss issues, solutions and initiatives to improve support for foster and kinship carers
- training for RFCAG representatives on their role and responsibilities
- amendments to the RFCAG terms of reference across regions to include AbSec representation.

A quarterly magazine, *Fostering our Future*, delivered news, advice and contact information to more than 2,400 carer families, with distribution extended to include all authorised kinship carers.

The Our Carers for Our Kids training package continued to deliver culturally appropriate training for new Aboriginal carers, while the Muslim Foster Care Program helped to recruit and support carers to provide culturally appropriate placements for children entering OOHc.

AbSec continues to provide support and advocate for carers of Aboriginal children and is funded by us specifically to establish more Aboriginal carer support groups across NSW and increase participation in these groups. Several new Aboriginal carer groups have been established in western and southern NSW, and this work will continue.

Fourteen Aboriginal carer 'leaders' completed a training pilot aimed at giving carers an active role in delivering training to other Aboriginal carers and to actively encourage participation in support groups. This leadership training role will happen across regions in 2012.

New culturally relevant support resources were developed following consultation with Aboriginal carers in urban and regional areas. The *Raising Them Strong* DVD, booklet and topic cards provide practical information and advice on topics including health, education, family contact, loss and grief and where to find support. Distribution will take place in July 2011.

This year, cultural training for authorised non-Aboriginal carers of Aboriginal children was delivered to

our staff across the regions. The cultural training was developed by ACWA to complement Shared Stories Shared Lives training and aimed at assisting non-Aboriginal carers to understand the importance of meeting the cultural needs of Aboriginal children and young people in care.

A review of allowances and contingencies paid to carers was undertaken, including a comparison with payments in other Australian jurisdictions. Payments to carers in NSW are among the most generous in Australia. A number of options for ensuring that allowances and contingencies are well targeted and cost effective are under consideration.

As a result of recent changes to the Child Care Rebate by the Commonwealth Government, we asked all carers to ensure that the Child Care Rebate is paid directly to the child care service provider to offset fees. We will reimburse carers for the full costs of child care after the Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate have been applied.

This year, changes to Supported Care Allowance assessments were introduced to ensure only children who are in need of care and protection and are unable to safely remain with their parents receive the allowance. Changes made to the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* legislation about when this allowance can be paid apply to all supported carers.

Carers who receive the Supported Care Allowance were advised of the changes to the eligibility criteria which may affect them.

The Supported Care 'No Order' Project is transitioning existing supported care where there are no order arrangements to align with the new legislative

NSW out-of-home carer payment rates (fortnightly)

ALLOWANCE	AGE GROUPS	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11
Care	0–4	\$395	\$403	\$413
	5–13	\$443	\$452	\$463
	14–17	\$595	\$607	\$622
Care + 1	0–4	\$591	\$603	\$618
	5–13	\$665	\$679	\$696
	14–17	\$891	\$910	\$933
Care + 2	0–4	\$782	\$798	\$818
	5–13	\$877	\$895	\$917
	14–17	\$1,177	\$1,202	\$1,232

Adoption orders

	2007–08	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11
Out-of-home care adoptions	22	30	48	45
Local adoptions	15	20	13	14
Step-parent adoptions	10	9	16	33
Special case adoptions	2	3	2	1
Relative adoptions	3	-	-	1
Intercountry adoptions	73	93	78	70

Source: KIDS – Corporate Information Warehouse annual data.

provisions. Following a trial looking at pre-proclamation cases, new assessment and review procedures were introduced statewide.

ADOPTION AND PERMANENT CARE

Adoption or permanent care can give a child a sense of security and belonging to a family when they cannot remain with their birth or extended family.

We provide adoption services within four key programs comprising:

- OOHC
- local adoption and permanent care including special needs, intrafamilial and special case adoption
- intercountry adoption
- post-adoption.

Where it has been assessed that children are not able to live with their parents or extended family, permanency is achieved

for children through adoption. During the past four years, the numbers of adoption orders made for children in care has more than doubled. As at 30 June 2011, there were:

- applications for the adoption of 18 children under Parental Responsibility of the Minister before the court awaiting determination
- 118 children where an application is being prepared for court following assessment and approval by us
- 194 children for whom the suitability of adoption is currently being assessed
- 226 children where an inquiry has been received about commencing the process of exploring adoption.

In 2010–11, 48 birth parents were counselled about adoption and permanent care alternatives. The program is holding 189

expressions of interest in local adoption. As at 30 June 2011, there were 38 families approved and awaiting placement of a child through the program.

While the Commonwealth Government now manages overseas adoption programs, we are responsible for processing intercountry adoption applications that are sent to overseas countries. As at 30 June 2011, 420 families made up the intercountry adoption program caseload, which includes 42 families being assessed, 266 families with a file overseas awaiting an adoption proposal and 21 families who have received an adoption proposal and are awaiting their notice to travel. In total, 53 families have been allocated a child in the past year and 94 families are receiving post-placement support.

In 2010–11, 45 children arrived in NSW with their adoptive family, and 70 intercountry adoption orders were made. The number of intercountry adoptions and applications lodged in NSW continues to decline, while a steady withdrawal rate of intercountry adoption applications is becoming evident.

During the year, we contributed to the review of National Minimum Principles in Adoption, which will contribute to greater consistency across states and territories. The revised principles will be submitted to the Community and Disability Services Ministers for endorsement.

Under the Commonwealth State Agreement for the Continued Operation of Australia's Intercountry Adoption Program, we have contributed to a working party on the harmonisation of adoption legislation and practice and investigation of alternative models for the operation and administration of intercountry adoption in Australia.

Supporting children in care

CONTINUED

We continued to fund the Post Adoption Resource Centre to provide information, assistance and support to people who were adopted and members of their birth and adoptive families.

Our Adoption Information Unit released identifying information (names and dates of birth) to 707 people, allowing them to search for family members. A total of 635 people received social and medical information about other parties to their adoptions from our adoption records.

A total of 258 families with an adopted person under the age of 18 received ongoing support including a range of specialist mediation and referral services. At 30 June 2011, there were 29,880 people registered on the Reunion and Information Register, with 176 people matched and contact mediated this year.

In March 2011, we provided a submission to the Senate Community Affairs Committee Inquiry, *Commonwealth contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices*. The NSW submission provided some historical context on former adoption practices and the influence of Commonwealth policies and programs. The Senate Committee is expected to report later in the year.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE RESTORED TO THEIR FAMILY

If possible, the possibility of restoration needs to be decided early and before any other permanent placement option is considered. A decision about restoration should take no longer than six months for non-Aboriginal children aged two

years or less, and 12 months for older children and young people.

Work continues to ensure that specific consideration is given to Aboriginal participation in decision-making, with the Restoration Decision-Making Guide, which forms part of the Permanency Planning guidelines, adapted to meet the identity and cultural needs of Aboriginal children.

A new initiative, the Short Term Court Order Family Preservation and Restoration Pilot, forms part of Keep Them Safe commitments to reduce the number of children who need to enter care and remain in care, and thereby develop a more sustainable OOHC system.

We are working with the Children's Court to reduce timeframes for court proceedings and improve the use of existing legislative provisions including parental supervision. By considering assessment and restoration at key points in the case management process, the pilot is encouraging more family restoration in appropriate circumstances.

Caseworkers provide intensive casework alongside NGOs which deliver intensive family preservation services to families at risk of having children enter foster care. The \$7.5 million funded pilot is working with up to 235 families in Raymond Terrace, Gosford, Central Sydney and Eastern Sydney over the next two years. An independent evaluation will be completed in 2013.

A trial of permanency planning for Aboriginal children aged two years and under and their siblings began in April 2011. The 12-month trial is taking place at Shellharbour, Central Sydney, Blacktown and Armidale.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH HIGH NEEDS

Some children and young people in OOHC have extremely challenging behaviours associated with a traumatic history and need access to specialist programs and supports.

NGOs provide special OOHC placements for these young people, including intensive foster care, intensive residential care and a small number of supported independent living placements, with around 816 placements in total.

Our Intensive Support Services provide intensive case management for high needs children and young people. Teams work closely with OOHC agencies which provide day-to-day care for this vulnerable group. Caseworkers coordinate the multiple agencies that are usually involved in supporting children and young people with complex needs through regular case planning and review.

Casework teams operate in Sydney, Wollongong, Gosford and Newcastle with outposted caseworkers in northern and western NSW. This year, regional panels conducted more than 5,000 reviews of placement and case plans for high needs children.

Last year, a new model of therapeutic secure care was developed for a small group of children and young people whose behaviours place them at extreme risk of harm to themselves and who cannot be safely managed in a less secure setting. Sherwood House, managed by us, is the only therapeutic secure care service in NSW and provides treatment and placement to five young people. The outcome research indicates

a significant reduction in self-harm and challenging behaviours for these young people.

Metro Intensive Support Services and Sherwood House were assessed as meeting OOHC standards by the Office of the Children's Guardian in the second half of 2010.

This year 118, children and young people who have complex care needs were assisted, including 21 new referrals. Ten young people left care during this period.

Our other initiatives in 2010–11 supporting children and young people with high needs included:

- partnerships with Taronga Zoo Sydney and Taronga Western Plains Zoo providing eight high needs young people with experience in animal handling and zoo keeping
- Alternate Care Clinic at Westmead Children's Hospital, a joint program with NSW Health delivering mental health services to high needs children in western Sydney
- immunisation clinics held jointly between High Street Youth Services and Metro Intensive Support Services
- partnership with the Juniperina Housing Accord established to provide housing and support services to young women (aged 16 to 21 years) at risk of reoffending and entering or re-entering Juniperina Juvenile Justice Centre
- Integrated Case Management Project for young offenders who have conditional bail and cannot be released from detention because they are homeless.

IMPROVING EDUCATION, HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES

A Charter of Rights booklet for children, young people and

carers was updated and reprinted to give children and young people information about their rights and encourage them to participate in decision-making.

Under Keep Them Safe, all children and young people entering OOHC receive a comprehensive health and development assessment within 30 days. The OOHC Health Screening and Assessment Pathway is led by NSW Health in partnership with us, and includes health screening, development of health management plans, health service intervention and review for children and young people entering statutory OOHC.

All children and young people in care are eligible to apply for a foster child health care card which offers cheaper prescription medicine and bulk-billed general practitioner visits, and reduces out of hospital medical expenses.

A partnership with Sydney Children's Hospital Randwick operates a screening clinic for children and young people in care and makes recommendations for further diagnostic work, treatment or specialist assessment. During the year, the clinic saw 46 children.

Under Keep Them Safe, each child and young person in statutory OOHC should have an individual education plan prepared for them within 30 days. We partner with the Department of Education and Communities to ensure that this happens. The Memorandum of Understanding between us and the Department of Education and Communities was revised to include the increased role of NGOs in delivering more OOHC services.

AFTERCARE SERVICES

The *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* provides assistance for young people who are transitioning from OOHC to independent living. Assistance can include help to find accommodation,

undertake education and training, or access income support and healthcare. It may also include referrals to counselling services.

Online and printed information about leaving care, including Your Next Step, is available for young people, carers and OOHC agencies, and provides information about entitlements and support. During the year, we published *Leading The Way* to help carers prepare and support young people. Training is now offered to carers through Connecting Carers NSW to support their role in preparing young people for adult life.

Transitioning to independence is a key priority area under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, and NSW is working closely with the Commonwealth Government to improve outcomes for young care leavers. NSW is contributing to the development of a nationally consistent approach to leaving care and a review of the Transition to Independent Living Allowance.

Wattle Place is a new statewide support service for any person who grew up in institutional care in NSW regardless of where they now live in Australia. Funded by us, it is now run by Relationships Australia NSW. Inquiries for support and assistance can be made on 1800 656 884.

During 2010–11, a new specialist unit was established to improve the processing of applications from care leavers wanting to access their personal information in our records. Specialist staff were also employed to identify and prioritise for indexing surviving historic Community Services records which mention mature age care leavers. This project is especially important for care leavers for whom there are no surviving ward files.

Supporting services and systems

This year we continued to deliver frontline child protection services and implement major change and reform.

Providing evidence-based, accountable and transparent quality services remains paramount as we carry out reviews, audits and investigations, and provide public information through our website, publications, community education programs and reports about our work.

Work continued to strengthen relationships and partnerships with NGOs, peaks and other key agencies to build our service delivery system, including increasing the capacity of NGOs to deliver more services in the future. We currently fund about 1,500 services and programs.

More than 62 percent of our total budget in 2010–11 was spent on supporting or procuring services from our community partners, including NGOs and other external providers.

Quarterly statistical reports were provided to partner agencies providing feedback about contacts made by the Child Wellbeing Units.

Reporting on OOHC was improved in 2010–11 to provide more detailed information by service type and integrating financial and non-financial information into a single consolidated reporting structure.

The structure of the Finance Committee was reviewed and, to provide better financial accountability and strategic budget management, it now forms part of Community Services Senior Executive Forum.

A major project is underway to make the client management system more efficient so that caseworkers can spend more time with clients.

The Assist Program was established to integrate a number of projects that were previously run separately.

This has brought together the following projects:

- KiDS Core Design Update, including the Corporate Information Warehouse update
- Structured Decision Making® (SDM), including business process mapping
- Community Online Management System
- workload management
- Mandatory Reporter feedback
- extension of eReporting to include more government departments.

During the year, psychological support services were expanded, providing expert support to both caseworkers and children and young people. The service now has a rural and remote team which operates as a “flying squad” providing assessment and support to families and children in isolated areas.

Psychologists assisted casework on more than 300 cases, including many complex cases needing several consultations. Additionally, psychologists provided:

- positive behaviour support training for 40 casework staff
- a program for casework staff on mental health in collaboration with specialist staff in the Clinical Issues Unit
- 20 courses for carers; each course involved weekly sessions for five to eight weeks.

A full internship program for nine provisionally registered psychologists is currently being developed. In addition, four Aboriginal provisional psychologists were supported and completed a cadetship program.

When a child who is known to Community Services dies, a review of our involvement is completed. Outcomes are used to improve organisational policies, procedures and practice. We work closely with other agencies involved in a child death review, particularly the NSW Ombudsman and the NSW Coroner.

In 2010–11, 110 initial reviews, six child death reviews and two critical report reviews were completed. The roll-out of an Action Learning Strategy to deliver the findings of the Deaths of Aboriginal Children and Young People 2005–07 cohort review to our frontline staff was also completed.

A range of practice reviews, training sessions and papers for internal and external forums, including the Second Australasian Conference on Child Death Inquiries and Reviews, were also developed.

The Reportable Conduct Unit (formerly Allegations Against Employees) responds to allegations of reportable conduct by our staff, including authorised carers. In consultation with stakeholders, the unit’s name was changed in 2011 to better describe the scope of its work.

During the year, the unit received 1,006 referrals, began 383 investigations and finalised 378 investigations. More than half of the 1,006 reports (605) did not meet the threshold of reportable conduct. Of the 383 that met the threshold, 16 percent (60) were referred to the Ombudsman.

In 2010 the unit worked intensively with the regions to complete their carer investigations so that the centralised response model could be fully implemented. The unit has also developed policies and procedures that ensure that investigations are clearly related to the seriousness of the allegation and the level of risk an employee presents to the safety and wellbeing of children.

We also worked with the NSW Ombudsman’s Office to develop a shared understanding of matters that are exempt from reporting on an individual basis to the Ombudsman under the Class or Kind agreement.

In 2010–11, the NSW Ombudsman made 292 requests for information which were coordinated centrally, while 93 requests involved the Ombudsman’s office dealing directly with our staff.

In 2010–11 1,661 requests were processed from other external agencies, an increase from the 400 last year.

On 18 April 2011, we began exchanging information using Chapter 16A of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*. Chapter 16A allows information to be exchanged between certain organisations working with or providing services to children and young people and their families, despite other laws that prohibit or restrict the disclosure of personal information, to promote the safety, welfare or wellbeing of children or young persons.