



Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

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Nick Boesten
Coroner's Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
By email: cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

Dear Mr Boesten

Investigation into the passing of JZA - COR 2017 2564

I write in response to your letter dated 6 December 2023, which enclosed a copy of Coroner Leveasque Peterson's findings into the passing of JZA, and recommendations made to the Department of Families Fairness and Housing (the department) and Berry Street Victoria (BSV).

Coroner Peterson made two recommendations for the department.

I provide the following responses to each recommendation on behalf of the department.

Recommendation one

I recommend that BSV and DFFH jointly review the Care Team Meeting process to ensure there is a clear designation of roles and responsibilities, including the taking and dissemination of minutes.

The department supports this recommendation in principle. The department is committed to ensuring roles and responsibilities are clearly identified and articulated and had already undertaken significant work in this area prior to the receipt of this recommendation.

In 2022, following the inquest in this matter and prior to receipt of these recommendations, the department undertook a review of the Care Team advice (Document ID number 2110) and Care Team procedures (Document ID number 1103) on the Child Protection Manual (the Manual). This review resulted in updates to clarify the responsibilities surrounding the arrangement of health assessments and medical appointments, inclusive of communication obligations to Child Protection, contracted community service organisations (CSO) or Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO). The amended advice and procedure were published on the Manual in May 2022.

Since receipt of the Coroner Peterson's recommendations these documents have been reviewed further and strengthened to confirm the Care Team convenor is responsible for documenting minutes and ensuring the responsibilities and actions of the Care Team are

allocated to specific members of the Care Team (including themselves where appropriate), and this is to be reflected in the recorded actions. This includes documenting responsibility for tasks, associated timelines and case progress. The Manual now makes it clear that where a CSO or ACCO is providing the placement, the Care Team convenor is the CSO or ACCO staff member. Where the placement is provided by the department, Child Protection is the Care Team convenor. These changes were published on the Manual on 18 January 2024.

On 1 February 2024, the Executive Director, Inner Gippsland Area and the Manager of Agency Performance and System Support, Department of Families Fairness and Housing, met with the BSV Acting CEO, BSV Executives and Senior Management to discuss the revised practice advice about roles and responsibilities of Care Team Meetings and clear designation of who is taking and disseminating the minutes. The representatives from BSV indicated that they liked the increased clarity in the documents, particularly that of the House Supervisor and the parent/carer involvement. The meeting participants agreed that whilst the Care Team convenor should document the minutes, it is often difficult to chair a meeting and take minutes, and in practice the convenor may delegate this responsibility. It was agreed that for BSV meetings, the convenor will still be responsible for ensuring that the minutes reflect the meeting discussion and agreed outcomes, and that they are disseminated to the Care Team. The group agreed to having the minutes distributed within three business days of the meeting taking place.

To ensure these changes were communicated to the sector this information was included in the Funded Agency Channel newsletter in February 2024. This monthly newsletter provides information to support the work of the department and the agencies it funds. It is targeted at service providers (including their staff) but is open to public subscription. It currently has over 5900 subscribers. The information about the changes to the Care Team instructions was also discussed with the contract managers (Agency Performance and System Support) via an Agency Performance and System Support Managers meeting held on 13 February 2024.

Recommendation two

I recommend DFFH considers how to enhance its audit function to ensure regular audits of all out of home care residential units.

The coroner's recommendation to enhance the audit function within the department is accepted in principle. The department remains committed to strengthened governance and oversight of all out of home care residential care services. The department will work closely with the new Social Services Regulator to have coordinated quality oversight once the Regulator commences in July 2024.

The department will review existing resources committed to the audit function and determine the frequency of audits that can be committed within existing resources, and if there can be an enhancement to the regulatory of the completion of these audits. If it deems this inadequate, the department will seek additional resources for the audit function.

Since 2023 the work of the audit team has been enhanced by prioritisation of these audits according to identified risk. Intelligence is obtained through analysis of data, such as incident reports, and through communication with practitioners and agency contract managers.

The work will also be enhanced through the education of departmental contract managers about how they can use audit tools to make periodic assessments of the quality and care within residential care services on visits to residential care facilities. This will equip other staff within the department with the skills to undertake assessment and provide quality oversight to young people in care and raise risks.

The expected timeframe for these actions to be completed (including provision of training to contract managers) is July 2024.

Should you have any queries, please contact Michael Mefflin, Executive Director, Service Agreement and Quality Systems, [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely



Danny O'Kelly
Deputy Secretary
Community Operations and Practice Leadership Division

05/03/2024