

# Response to: IPART Out-of-Home Care costs and pricing Interim Report



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<b>From:</b>	Barnardos Australia
<b>Subject:</b>	IPART Out-of-Home Care costs and pricing Interim Report September 2024

## Barnardos Australia Specialised OOHC Results

For over 100 years Barnardos Australia (Barnardos) has been a leading child protection charity, providing support to 15,000+ children and families across New South Wales (NSW) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) each year. This includes up to 1,200 children placed in Barnardos Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) per annum.

Barnardos provides specialised, evidence driven foster care programs based on planned child outcomes, with discrete and specifically trained managers, case workers and teams. Carers for children are professionally assessed, trained and authorised based on motivation and skill set to achieve and deliver planned child outcomes. Barnardos OOHC programs and planned child outcomes are closely aligned to previous and current NSW legislation, specifically the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act, 1998*.

Barnardos specialist OOHC comprises:

- Temporary Family Care (children entering care on NSW Children's Court Interim Orders)
- Kinship Care
- Open Adoption (for non-Aboriginal children)
- Permanent Care (children on NSW Children's Court Orders for Parental Responsibility to 18 years of age).

These four discretely specialised program streams have been operating in NSW for almost 40 years and independently validated by esteemed academics and university researchers over this period. Publications are numerous from Barnardos' related research including books published by Emeritus Professors Elizabeth Fernandez UNSW and Harriet Ward Oxford University UK (references are available on request)

Barnardos is the only NSW non-government organisation (NGO) to hold a Deed of Delegation on the Exercise of Aspects of Parental Responsibility for Children and Young People under the Minister's Responsibility, agreed in 2007 and renewed by the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) ongoingly since that time.

Barnardos knows our specialised model to providing different foster care types, rather than generalist foster care, works in delivering planned outcomes for children in OOHC. In 2024, Barnardos engaged an external review of Barnardos Temporary Family Care (TFC) outcome data comparatively with state averages for the data points of:

- rate of restoration
- carer retention
- placement stability
- other – e.g., comprehensiveness of wrap around support.

Barnardos OOHC data clearly shows the following key outcomes:

- Barnardos' rate of restoration from TFC is 2.9 times the rate experienced by the general NSW OOHC population (including government and non-government provided foster care).

- Carer specialisation and high retention is directly linked to Barnardos recruitment and authorisation processes.
- Barnardos foster care allowance rates for specialist TFC carers are above statutory rates, reflecting direct involvement of these foster carers in Children’s Court related assessment for restoration and direct restoration involvement with parents of the child (noting higher than statutory rates are also provided for permanent placements of children in long-term foster care, previously known as Barnardos Find A Family program).
- The number of children allocated per Barnardos caseworker (caseload ratio) is evidenced to deliver planned child outcome and allow for intensity of work required (specifically TFC and open adoption team caseworkers have lower caseloads due to associated legal work and to enable intensive support of foster carers, and biological families.
- NSW Office of the Children’s Guardian data indicates 60% of NSW foster carers provide care for less than 5 years, whereas Barnardos’ average experience of current carers is 5.5 years, and
- More than 80% of children in Barnardos’ foster care experience no placement changes while in Barnardos’ foster care.

Barnardos TFC teams are co-located within our Children’s Family Centres which provide trauma-informed supported playgroups, counselling, parenting coaching and education, ongoing supports via warm referrals to other agencies, directly leading to faster exits of children from care. Children placed in Barnardos’ TFC on average exiting after 16.5 months of care, compared to other NSW government and non-government where two thirds of foster care exits occur after more than 2 years of care.

Barnardos provides the following response to the request for feedback in the Interim Report – IPART Out-of-Home Care costs and pricing – September 2024.

### Question Specific Comments

#### 1. What additional support is provided to carers to ensure they are prepared to care for a child in OOHC?

Barnardos achieves child outcomes via specialised models of care. Discrete specialised teams do this in partnership with carers ensuring seamless communication and planning for individual child need.

Barnardos Australia enacts specialisation per foster-care type and carer support by:

- A collaborative approach to carer assessments and authorisation with carer applicants engaging with the specific OOHC program type and child outcome based motivation to provide foster care.
- The process of assessment and authorisation includes a collective review via a specifically convened Barnardos Carer Panel and input from Panel Members. Panel members have scope to make specific recommendations regarding carer learning and development, child placement matching and carer support.

- Extensive matching procedures that consider child development-based planning. **Please see peer reviewed journal publication attached**, which highlights multiple strategies Barnardos uses to support foster and adoptive carers. Citation: Flaherty, R. (2024). Babies and very young children entering Out-of-Home Care: Getting it right with child development-based planning for children, carers and adoptive carers. *International Journal of Birth and Parent Education*, 12(1): 15-19.
- Providing practical supports that are evidenced to make a difference to carers being able to cope with difficult circumstances, such as assistance with house-cleaning costs, provision of ready-meals, access to foodbank/Oz Harvest, rubbish removal, removalist costs, use of caravan and loan of a larger vehicle to support placements of large sibling groups.
- Providing an extended initial carer training program (expanded on sector wide ACWA Shared Lives Carer Training package).
- Inclusion of specifically focussed/issues targeted training e.g. Rights and Responsibilities and for TFC carers specific induction/orientation including Children's Court processes training.
- Providing carers and children access to a designated holiday house.
- Implementation of a Carer Development Plan immediately post authorisation to articulate support and training/education needs of each authorised carer in conjunction with their experience and the needs of specific child/ren.
- Specific individualised support to carers to maintain short-term placements and support restoration, including additional home visits, a buddy system where new TFC carers are paired with experienced TFC carers especially around specific child needs e.g. babies born with Neonatal Withdrawal Syndrome, tips on interacting with birth families for strong and respectful relationships, extra respite arrangements, and parenting courses.
- Adoptive carers participating in pre-filing mediation.
- Carers awaiting permanent or adoptive placement engaging in respite care to build experience in supporting children in care.
- Arranging access for all authorised carer groups to agency funded, external facilitated carer training program provided by Fostering Growth and Your Mob Learning.
- Involvement of a carer recruitment/carer support team with carers post child placement to assist in navigating child placement transition and as a further mechanism for carer support.
- Providing the option of access to existing authorised carers (mentors) as required.
- Providing comprehensive wraparound supports via Barnardos Children's Family Centres including trauma-informed supported playgroups – where, for example, TFC carers and birth families can attend together; counselling, parenting coaching and education; ongoing supports via warm referrals to other agencies; and opportunities to stay connected with Barnardos' general family and days of celebration events such as information days, cultural celebrations e.g. NAIDOC etc.

## 2. What examples of wraparound services does your organisation/District provide to children in your care that have contributed to their improved wellbeing?

Several of the examples provided as answers to question 1, include wraparound supports. However, in addition to those, Barnardos provides the following wraparound services that contribute to the improved wellbeing of children and young people in our care.

- Barnardos'-facilitated school holiday activities.
- We provided supported accommodation to a parent (dad), in a two-bedroom unit for one year to ensure restoration was possible.
- Barnardos (Kinship Care Program) rented an apartment for 3 months so the carer and young person in care could live separately from the rest of the family for a short period; this sustained that placement.
- Targeted carer recruitment campaign with internally set Key Performance Indicators to meet internal and external child placement demand.

### **3. For providers of foster care, what strategies have you implemented to improve foster carer recruitment?**

Barnardos has ongoing quality brand reputation for foster care which means we receive a high number of foster carer recruitment enquiries directly as a result of recommendation by current carers. Potential carers responding to Barnardos carer recruitment campaigns tell us that they trust Barnardos. Our reputation is built on the impactful and sustained outcomes we achieve for children, young people, birth families and carers. Therefore, one strategy we continually rely upon is achieving these outcomes and letting our work speak for itself, including results of our accreditation processes and supports we provide to carers.

### **4. What activities and costs are involved in ensuring a smooth transition of Aboriginal children to ACCOs?**

Barnardos has led by example in the 2023-24 year by achieving the highest number of NSW non-government organisation transitions of Aboriginal children (n=13) to ACCOs. This was acknowledged at the DCJ Aboriginal OOHCC Transition Project Advisory Group Meeting and comprises 28% of all transitions achieved for the year. Most costs relate to the significant investment of additional time in preparing, planning for and undertaking Aboriginal child transitions – from initial relationship building with ACCOs, development of MOUs, initial discussions with carers, data requirements for DCJ, through to finalising the transition.

Elements that have supported smooth transitions of Aboriginal children to ACCOs include:

- Having a good understanding of relevant ACCOs, their operating boundaries/catchment, and their capacity.
- Research and consultation with ACCOs and engaging with senior ACCO representatives initially is a substantial time investment.
- Meet and greet opportunities have assisted Barnardos' case managers familiarisation and trust by ACCOs, encouraging carers to transfer.
- Travel costs, time and catering morning/afternoon teas associated with all stages of relationship development and transitions.
- Arranging meetings online and in-person with regular ongoing communication, completion of assessments, provision of documents, internal tracking of progress, additional touch points with carers to encourage/convince carers to transfer.
- Joint recruitment with ACCOs for placement of specific child/ren, including Barnardos funding targeted recruitment for specific ACCOs.

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