

Carer Council Communique

June 2024

Update

The Carer Council held its third meeting on 4 June 2024.

Meeting topics

On the agenda for discussion was:

- Carer Remuneration, and
- Sibling connections.

Rationale for topics

Due to the additional time needed to fulfil the agenda set for the March meeting, the Carer Council reduced the number of topics to discuss for its June meeting.

Carer remuneration was set on the agenda as a priority topic for the carer community.

Sibling connections was included as a key topic for the Minister to align with work currently underway in the sector. For example, CREATE Foundation is currently co-designing a guide with children and young people to guide DCP staff and carers in supporting stronger sibling connections. Other agencies and groups are also advocating systemically on this issue.

Attendance

Carer Council Members: Alexandra Ingleton, Dana Wright, Emily Ware (online), Gai McMichael, Gail Ward (online for partial attendance), Jakob Schmaal, Kailah Hurditch, Kate Thomas, Lorraine Joy (Chair), Peter Kennedy (online), and Suzanne Scanlon.

Support: Dana Shen (Facilitator), Lauren Gibbs (Carer Council Project Lead, CF&KC-SA).

Apologies: Ellese Nelson, Fiona Endacott.

Guest speakers:

- Shona Reid, Guardian for Children and Young People attended for a one-hour presentation on sibling connections.
- Emma Feagan and Matthew Richardson, CF&KC-SA project officers, provided pre-recorded presentations on carer remuneration that Members watched in advance of the meeting.

Themes arising from the meeting

Overarching themes discussed include:

- Access to information for carers;
- Consistency and transparency in policies and decisions;
- Informing, supporting, consulting, valuing and respecting carers in line with the Statement of Commitment to South Australian Foster and Kinship Carers.

Under the topic of **carer remuneration** the Carer Council chose to have a particular focus on the Special Needs Loading (SNL) tool and the Complexity Assessment Tool (CAT). Some themes include:

- A need for training and education on the tools for both the workforce and carers.
- A desire for more transparency in policies and procedures.
- More carer involvement in the processes.
- The SNL tool's flaws in effectively identifying and supporting special needs of children and young people.
- Problems with the age appropriateness of the CAT tool, particularly for younger children.

The Carer Council is also particularly interested in consistency of reimbursements and better clarity in the document *Carer Reference One: Who Pays for What?*.

The Carer Council has noted a variety of other concerns for carers under the broader theme of remuneration, including:

- The rates of subsidy payments and loadings.
- Additional or discretionary funding requests.
- Insurance for carers' property.
- Inability to obtain loans due to lack of recognised income.
- The particular financial impact on kinship carers.
- Awareness of parenting benefits.
- The impact caring has on employment and loss of income.
- The impact caring has on superannuation.

- Support for young people over 18.

Themes in discussions on **sibling connections** include:

- An acknowledgement on the nuance and diversity of sibling connections across different placements. Support for sibling connections is reflected in various ways, noting that every situation is unique and sibling contact may not be suitable for particular children and young people. For example:
 - Carers who care for sibling groups in the same placement.
 - Kinship carers who are, themselves, siblings of the children and young people they care for.
 - Carers who facilitate sibling connections through formal respite or informal catch-ups.
 - Carers who travel great distances with their children and young people to see their siblings.
 - Carers who engage with DCP to help facilitate connections with siblings.
- Sibling connections as a new topic for carers to address solely with their peers and from the carer perspective.
- The need to consult more broadly and do further research into sibling connections from the carer perspective.
- A variety of barriers in sibling connections, such as:
 - Confidence of carers to manage sibling contact without DCP support.
 - Permission to have contact.
 - Inconsistent financial support from DCP.
 - Contact that is not child-focussed.
 - Carers being left out of decision-making.
 - Transparency from all parties.
 - Individuality of children and young people and their views.
 - Supports for children, young people, carers and families to foster positive sibling relationships.
 - Dysregulated or "wobbly" behaviour before and after contact.
 - Barriers in the legislation.

- Lack of life story work and understanding of families.
- No clear definition of sibling. For example, whether it includes biological siblings only, or broader sibling-like relationships such as cousins, foster siblings, stepsiblings and important non-biological connections close in age.

Next meeting

The next meeting of the Carer Council will be held on 4 November 2024.

Approved quotes

It's gratifying to see that our top priorities as carers align closely with the Minister's agenda. Carer remuneration is a critical concern for us, as it directly impacts our ability to effectively support the children in our care and meet their diverse needs. The Carer Council emphasizes the importance of ongoing dialogue and investigation into this significant issue. While we understand that systemic change takes time, we advocate for incremental steps to be implemented swiftly to improve the support for carers.

Lorraine Joy, Carer Council Chair

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