

Comments on the Consultation Paper in relation to the proposed Victorian Carers Reward Card

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare welcomes any proposal that seeks to acknowledge the work done by kinship and foster carers in Victoria. Thus our membership is supportive of the introduction of such a card. It should, however, in no way replace on-going examination of carer reimbursement rates and the importance of adequate financial support commensurate with the important responsibilities undertaken by carers within the out-of-home care system as well as by those kith and kin carers who are outside the statutory system.

The definition of “carer” (pp1-2) is concerning in that kinship carers are not specifically mentioned. This lack of acknowledgement continues throughout the paper, with the first mention occurring on page 2 as some kind of “sub-set” of foster carers. Alongside foster carers, kinship carers must be noted specifically in the various categories of carers up front - .i.e. on pp 1-2, and their inclusion needs to continue throughout wherever out-of-home care provision is mentioned. We also see it as most important to include in the “carer” definition non-statutory kinship carers, who are in receipt of no Commonwealth or State related payments unless they are on a very low income. We welcome the inclusion of permanent carers and respite carers in the definition.

Regarding eligibility criteria, we believe that the only fair and viable option is No. 3. The definition as noted on p. 8 that the eligibility be based on a carer providing “primary care to a person with a disability or physical or mental illness, or...a foster carer”, must be broadened specifically to include kinship carers, both statutory and non-statutory. While determining the on-going caring responsibilities of a non-statutory kinship carer may be harder to achieve than through the “periodic verification of ...Card holders ...occurring with Centrelink and DHS records” (p. 10), we strongly believe that this group of carers needs to be included alongside others so long as the care of a child not their own remains their responsibility.

A comment about the name of the card – we believe that calling it a “reward” card is somewhat patronizing, and is not in keeping with the names of other like cards – Seniors and Companion. Therefore we suggest that simply calling it the “Carers Card” would be more appropriate.

On pg. 2 it is noted that DHS have recently launched a recruitment and retention strategy for foster carers. This far-reaching strategy, launched by the Minister for Community Services in March 2009 and established, managed and administered by the Centre for Excellence on behalf of our members, is showing excellent results in the first three months of the concerted media and information campaign, with a 25% increase in enquiries from the public. If a Carers Card can be introduced as a small additional acknowledgement of the work foster carers (and kinship carers) do, then this is a welcome move.