

resource sheet

NATIONAL CHILD PROTECTION CLEARINGHOUSE

Children in care

Alister Lamont

What is out-of-home care?

Out-of-home care refers to the care of children and young people up to 18 years who are unable to live with their families (often due to child abuse and neglect). It involves the placement of a child or young person with alternate caregivers on a short- or long-term basis (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2007).

There are three main types of out-of-home care:

- *foster care*: where care is provided in the private home of a substitute family who receives payment that is intended to cover the child's living expenses;
- *kinship care*: where the caregiver is a family member or a person with a pre-existing relationship with the child; and
- *residential care*: where placement is in a residential building whose purpose is to provide placement for children and where there is paid staff. This includes facilities where there are rostered staff, where there is a live-in carer and where staff are off-site (e.g., a lead tenant or supported residence arrangement) (Australian Senate Community Affairs Committee, 2005, p. 78).

Out-of-home care can be arranged either formally or informally. Informal care refers to arrangements made without intervention by statutory authorities or courts; and formal care occurs following a child protection intervention (either by voluntary agreement or care and protection court order). This resource sheet will describe those children in out-of-home care in Australia who are on care and protection orders.

How many children live in out-of-home care in Australia?

The most recent statistics from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2011) report that, as of 30 June 2010, there were 35,895 Australian children living in out-of-home care. This is an increase of 5.3% from the recorded number of 34,069 children in out-of-home care in 2008–09. Table 1 shows the number of children in Australia admitted to out-of-home care, by age group, in each state and territory during 2009–10.

The number of children in out-of-home care has risen every year over the last 10 years (AIHW, 2011). As seen in Table 2, the number of children in out-of-home care has almost doubled from June 30, 2001 to June 30, 2010 (a rise of 97%). At 30 June 2010, the rate of children aged 0–17 years in out-of-home care was 7.0 children per 1,000 (AIHW, 2011).

What percentage of children in out-of-home care live in foster care in Australia?

The AIHW statistics show that 93.7% of all children living in out-of-home care in Australia are in home-based care. Of that figure, 49.2% are in foster care, 48.5% are in relative/kinship care and 2.3% are in a different kind of home-based care (AIHW, 2011).

Table 3 compares the proportion of children in out-of-home care by living arrangements for each state and territory. Of children in out-

Table 1. Children admitted to out-of-home care by age group, states and territories, 2009–10

Age (years)	NSW	VIC ¹	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT	Australia
<1	746	399	484	174	109	51	25	63	2,051
1–4	1,007	822	618	240	159	91	37	90	3,064
5–9	969	720	579	216	135	88	33	96	2,836
10–14	880	776	667	167	129	72	50	96	2,837
15–17	320	395	270	41	112	32	23	21	1,214
Total	3,922	3,112	2,618	838	644	334	168	366	12,002
Per cent									
<1	19.0	12.8	18.5	20.8	16.9	15.3	14.9	17.2	17.1
1–4	25.7	26.4	23.6	28.6	24.7	27.2	22.0	24.6	25.5
5–9	24.7	23.1	22.1	25.8	21.0	26.3	19.6	26.2	23.6
10–14	22.4	24.9	25.5	19.9	20.0	21.6	29.8	26.2	23.6
15–17	8.2	12.7	10.3	4.9	17.4	9.6	13.7	5.7	10.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

¹ Due to new service and data reporting arrangements, the Victorian child protection data as of 2006–07 may not be fully comparable with previous years' data. Note: The table includes all children admitted to out-of-home care for the first time, as well as those children returning to care who had exited care more than 2 months previously. Children admitted to out-of-home care more than once during the year were only counted at the first admission. Percentages exclude children of unknown age. Percentages in tables may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: AIHW, 2011, p. 46.

Table 2. Trends in children aged 0–17 years in out-of-home care, states and territories, 30 June 2000 to 30 June 2010

Year	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA (a)	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
2001	7,786	3,882	3,011	1,436	1,175	572	215	164	18,241
2002	8,084	3,918	3,257	1,494	1,196	544	224	163	18,880
2003	8,636	4,046	3,787	1,615	1,245	468	277	223	20,297
2004	9,145	4,309	4,413	1,681	1,204	487	298	258	21,795
2005	9,230	4,408	5,657	1,829	1,329	576	342	324	23,695
2006	9,896	4,794	5,876	1,968	1,497	683	388	352	25,454
2007	11,843	5,052 (b)	5,972	2,371	1,678	667 (c)	399	397	28,379
2008	13,566	5,056	6,670	2,546 (d)	1,841	664 (e)	425	398	31,166
2009	15,211	5,283	7,093	2,682	2,016	808	494	482	34,069
2010	16,175	5,469	7,350	2,737	2,188	893	532	551	35,895

(a) South Australia could only provide the number of children in out-of-home care where the Department of Families and Communities is making a financial contribution to the care of a child.

(b) Due to new service and data reporting arrangements, the Victorian child protection data for 2007 onwards may not be fully comparable with previous years' data. (c) The numbers of children in out-of-home care from 30 June 2007 onwards are not comparable to the numbers reported for previous years for Tasmania due to the exclusion of a cohort of children on orders who did not meet the definition of out-of-home care. (d) Data for 2008 onwards is not strictly comparable to earlier figures for Western Australia as they previously included children whose whereabouts were unknown or who were living with relatives who were not reimbursed. (e) Tasmania is not able to include children in care where a financial payment has been offered but has been declined by the carer. However, the number of carers declining a financial payment is likely to be very low.

Note: Some rates may not match those published in previous publications of Child Protection Australia due to retrospective updates.

Sources: AIHW, 2006, p. 45; AIHW, 2011, p. 54.

of-home care, Queensland and Tasmania had a relatively high proportion in foster care (59.8% and 50.8% respectively), and New South Wales had a relatively high proportion placed with relatives or kin (55.6%) compared to other states and territories (AIHW, 2011).

How many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children live in out-of-home care?

As of 30 June 2010, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children comprised 4.6% of all children aged 0–17 years in Australia (AIHW, 2011) yet in 2009–10 they constituted 32% of those children placed in out-of-home care. In all jurisdictions, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on placement orders was higher than that for other children. As of June 2010, there were 11,468 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care in Australia—a placement rate of 48.4 per 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0–17 years. In contrast, the rate for non-Indigenous children was 5.0 per 1,000. This indicates that the national rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care was almost 10 times the rate for other children (AIHW, 2011). There was substantial variation across the states and territories, with the placement rate of Indigenous children varying from 14.9 per

1,000 in the Northern Territory to 77.3 per 1,000 in New South Wales (AIHW, 2011).

What is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle?

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle has been endorsed in legislation or policy in all Australian states and territories. The principle states the preferred order of placement for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child who has been removed from their birth family. The preferred order is for the child to be placed with:

- the child's extended family (kin);
- the child's Indigenous community (kith); or
- other Indigenous people.

Only if an appropriate placement cannot be found from these three groups can an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child be placed with a non-Indigenous carer (Lock, 1997).

The principle provides an important acknowledgement that previous policies caused suffering to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and reflects the right of Indigenous people to raise their children and retain them in their communities (Lock, 1997).

Table 3. Proportion (%) of children in out-of-home care, by living arrangements, states and territories, as at 30 June 2010

Type of placement	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT	Australia
Foster care	41.5	40.8	59.8	46.3	46.3	50.8	41.2	45.6	46.1
Relatives/kin	55.6	40.0	32.5	45.1	38.7	32.0	50.0	22.9	45.5
Other home-based care	–	10.5	–	–	0.2	9.4	–	18.5	2.1
Total home-based care	97.2	91.3	92.3	91.4	85.2	92.3	91.2	86.9	93.7
Family group homes	–	–	–	2.3	–	2.1	–	4.4	0.3
Residential care	2.3	8.3	7.7	5.3	9.9	2.2	8.8	1.1	5.1
Independent living	0.5	0.4	–	0.9	1.3	–	–	0.7	0.4
Other	–	–	–	–	3.7	3.4	–	6.9	0.4
Total non-home based care	2.8	8.7	7.7	8.5	14.9	7.7	8.8	12.4	6.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Percentages in tables may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: AIHW, 2011, p. 49.

Children placed in one of the three preferred options are described as having been placed in accordance with the principle. The percentage of children placed in accordance with the principal varied substantially across jurisdictions from 31.9% in Tasmania to 82.2% of placements in New South Wales (see Figure 1). In Australia in 2009–10, 70.5% of Indigenous children were placed in accordance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (AIHW, 2011).

For more information see the NCPA Resource Sheet, *Child Protection and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children* <www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/sheets/rs10/rs10.html>.

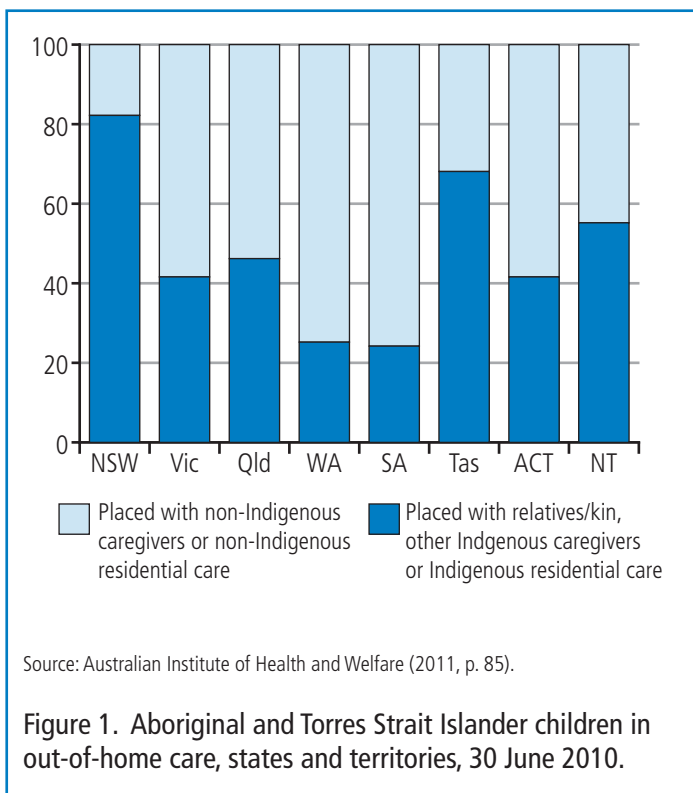


Figure 1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care, states and territories, 30 June 2010.

What does foster care cost?

Recurrent expenditure on child protection and out-of-home care services was approximately \$2.5 billion across Australia in 2009–10. Nationally, out-of-home care services accounted for the majority (64.9% or \$1.7 billion) of this expenditure (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2011). A study by the Social Policy Research Centre found that the cost of caring for children in foster care is, on average, 52% higher than the costs of caring for other children not in care (McHugh, 2002).

What are some of the key issues/challenges in foster care in Australia today?

Many children in out-of-home-care experience multiple placement changes (Delfabbro, King, & Barber, 2010; Rubin, O’Reilly, Luan, & Localio, 2007). In a study profiling children in out-of-home care in South Australia, Delfabbro, Barber, and Cooper (2001) found that 20% of the sample had between three and five placements, 18% had between six and nine placements, and 24%—almost a quarter of all children—had experienced 10 or more previous placements during their time in care. Placement instability can have significant adverse effects on children. A number of studies have found associations between continued instability and adverse psychosocial outcomes, such as emotional difficulties, behaviour problems and poor academic performance. For example, Rubin et al. (2007) found that placement instability is “a significant contributor to a child’s risk for behavioural problems unrelated to the baseline problems that a child had on referral for placement” (p. 343). Placement instability can be a significant concern for young people in care. In a survey of 1,767 Queensland children and young people in care, almost 20% of respondents were worried about having to move to another placement in the next few months (Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, 2008).

Recruiting enough carers to cope with the increased demand for foster carers is a concern for most states and territories (Delfabbro et al. 2010; Osborn, Panozzo, Richardson, & Bromfield, 2007). Some are advocating for the professionalisation of foster carers in a bid to facilitate recruitment and help the increasing number of children coming into the system with complex and challenging behaviour problems (Butcher, 2005).

With the reliance on home-based care and the problems recruiting sufficient numbers of foster carers, there has been a rapid increase in the proportion of children in kinship care (AIHW, 2011; Boetto, 2010; Delfabbro et al., 2010). Although studies have found that children and young people are able to identify positive experiences of living in kinship care (Mason, Fallon, Gibbons, Spence, & Scott, 2002), at this stage, there is insufficient research evidence to demonstrate whether or not kinship care produces better outcomes for children (Bromfield & Osborn, 2007a, 2007b).

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Author

Alister Lamont is a Research Officer for the National Child Protection Clearinghouse at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

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Australian Institute of Family Studies
Level 20, 485 La Trobe Street, Melbourne VIC 3000 Australia
Phone: (03) 9214 7888 Fax: (03) 9214 7839
Internet: <www.aifs.gov.au>

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