

ISSUES FACING CHILDREN IN CARE AND THEIR FAMILIES.

By: John Rabarts.

Recently asked a question about issues that face children in care and their families, I thought about what I would expect if this were one of my grandchildren, or a niece or nephew. I would certainly expect them to be well cared for, and that the care would be done safely. Knowing what I do about the care agencies, what they should be expecting of themselves and what families expect of them, these are my thoughts. These are not in any order of priority; they are just there.

Families have the right to expect that: -

- Caregiving agencies and departments will meet required national standards and will be audited and accountable
- Caregivers will be thoroughly vetted including Police, CYF and other department or health board checks.
- Induction training will be completed before placements begin.
- Caregivers will receive supportive and regular supervision.
- General and specialized training will be provided for Caregivers as needed. E.g. child behaviour, disability, mental health, cultural appropriateness including Treaty of Waitangi and Pacific peoples, first aid.
- Caregivers will have clear and safe standards in the home and in their care provision, and will be monitored in providing them by their agency.
- Adequate and accurate information will be provided to Caregivers before a placement is made
- Caregivers have the right to say 'no' to a placement offered.
- A family or adolescent have the right to say 'no' to a placement offered.
- Agencies or departments will ensure that there are regular support/liaison visits to caregiving families.
- Placements are to be as short as promised when made, and not left to languish unless there is additional discussion with the family, the Caregivers and the child (if old enough to express a view.)
- The referral or caregiving agency will provide ongoing support for the family for contacts with a social worker or caseworker within the referral agency.
- That Caregivers will not be overloaded with too many children in care or an inappropriate mix - for example Youth Justice and Care and Protection, sexual abusers and vulnerable children, or mental health mixes.
- That Caregivers need holidays like everyone else, in this case from caring, and are supported with regular respite or 'rests' between placements if they are short term or respite carers.
- Board, clothing special needs, pocket money allowances will be available quickly and accurately, and remedied immediately when in error
- That there is adequate and realistic planning for children in care.
- Communication of information is freely available to family/whanau.
- That there is family/whanau input into plans and into any ongoing changes
- Family access is kept as open and as frequent as is possible while keeping the child safe.
- There will be no physical punishment under any circumstances.
- Withdrawal of family contact is never used as a threat or applied as a punishment.
- The agency or department will ensure safety and support in transition from one carer to another or on return to family/whanau, or to independence.
- That Caregivers will receive adequate reimbursement of board and other costs at a level sufficient to maintain the placement - including costs for special needs such as counseling, transport, medication or specific training.
- That there will be support for Caregivers in situations where allegations arise with rapid processing and a quick return - with confidence- to caring where unsubstantiated.
- That there will be adequate support nationally to caregiving agencies, department's health boards and disability.
- That the support is not subject to regional or local shortfalls through monitoring by national structures such as the NZ Family and Fostercare Federation.
- A robust and useful national training strategy will be in place with delivery as widely as possible to Caregivers.
- Departmental, health board or disability requirements for children are met as recognized each in their

own right to the children concerned - and not glossed over, for instance by an agency claiming it can provide care for mental health children or adolescents on a CYF section 396 approval without meeting the additional mental health standards.

- Caregiver liaison staff, departmental or agency, are just that - not expected to fill dual or triple roles and that they are supervised adequately, supported and not overloaded

There will be others, which have not sprung to mind.

John Rabarts. *June 2003*