

## Statutory out-of-home care and adoption Accreditation and Monitoring

# Fact Sheet: Monitoring accredited agencies

The NSW Children's Guardian accredits agencies for the provision of services for children and young people in statutory out-of-home care and adoption. Agencies that are accredited by the Children's Guardian are referred to as designated agencies or adoption agencies

## Accreditation and Monitoring team

The Accreditation and Monitoring team within the Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG) has two main functions, the accreditation of designated and adoption agencies and the ongoing monitoring of these agencies. The accreditation function involves assessment of agencies seeking accreditation for the first time; accredited agencies commencing to provide out-of-home care or adoption services for the first time, and assessment of agencies seeking to renew accreditation. The monitoring function involves assessment of designated and adoption agencies at other times throughout the period of accreditation to ensure that they continue to meet the requirements of accreditation.

Designated agencies and adoption agencies are accredited when they have demonstrated they are meeting their responsibilities under the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* and the *Adoption Act 2000* and are meeting the requirements of the *NSW Child Safe Standards for Permanent Care* (the Standards). It is a requirement that accredited agencies continue to meet these requirements at all times. Further information about accreditation processes is provided in the Accreditation Guide, available on our website at [www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au](http://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au)

## Monitoring

The principal functions of the Children's Guardian are provided for in section 181 of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*. Sections 181(1)(e) and (k) relate specifically to the Children's Guardian's monitoring functions.

The OCG is committed to the continuous improvement of the out-of-home care and adoption sectors and conducts monitoring visits to confirm that agencies continue to meet the requirements of the legislation and standards and are taking steps to review and improve practice.

## When will my agency receive a monitoring visit?

All accredited agencies will have continued involvement with the OCG during the life of their accreditation. The Accreditation and Monitoring team will visit every accredited agency at least once in every 12-18 months. Whilst each assessment will look at similar criteria, the purpose of each visit will vary depending on the particular circumstances of the agency. If your agency is currently being assessed under a direct evidence program or for accreditation renewal, your monitoring visits will commence after these processes are complete.

In some cases monitoring visits to agencies will be planned to occur on a regular basis. In other cases monitoring visits will be at short notice in response to identified or reported risk, or a pattern of issues and concerns over time. In some circumstances monitoring visits will occur without prior notice to the agency.

Scheduled visits will be discussed with agency representatives so that agencies can provide information to assist in planning the visits, for example location of programs, placement numbers, staff numbers and positions etc.

## What are some of the reasons for a monitoring visit to an agency?

In most cases the purpose of monitoring visits is to confirm ongoing compliance with accreditation requirements. In other cases, monitoring visits will be in response to issues or concerns brought to the attention of the OCG by other sources for example, the NSW Ombudsman, Family and Community Services, or other OCG programs. Where concerns or issues have been identified, the agency will be prioritised for monitoring visits. Circumstances that may trigger a prioritised visit to an agency may include where:

- there are identified risks to children and young people
- there have been multiple critical incidents
- the death of a child or young person in statutory out-of-home care – unless the child or young person has an approved End of Life Plan in place at the time of their death.
- Working With Children Check (WWCC) compliance issues or other probity check concerns have been raised
- there has been an ongoing lack of current case planning for children and young people or a lack of leaving care planning
- the agency is unresponsive or delayed in responding to the OCG's feedback or requests
- an agency has not submitted Notifications to the Children's Guardian as required
- there are ongoing Carers Register issues
- significant change has occurred within an organisation eg board, management, staff turnover, rapid growth, multiple new geographical locations etc
- an agency's accreditation has been transferred in the previous 6–12 months
- concerns have been raised by NSW Family and Community Services or the NSW Ombudsman
- a pattern of complaints about the agency have been received from stakeholders eg children and young people, birth families, carers, staff or the public

Other reasons the OCG may prioritise a monitoring visit to an agency could include where the agency:

- has placed children under 12 years of age in residential care
- has a small number of placements
- has a large number of placements or large geographical spread
- does not have a board of management
- has a pattern of any of the above.

## What action is required by the agency prior to and during a monitoring visit?

The Accreditation and Monitoring team will contact the agency to arrange the most suitable time to schedule a monitoring visit. There will be minimal work required by the agency prior to the visit and it is expected that agency staff continue to undertake their usual roles during the assessment. However it is important that staff and management are available to participate in discussions with assessors and to answer questions as they arise.

The agency will need to provide a suitable workspace for OCG staff to hold confidential discussions and review documentation. If records are maintained electronically, access to computers and appropriate log-ins will be required for each assessor.

## What will a monitoring visit involve?

Please refer to the OCG Fact Sheet *Assessment by the Office of the Children's Guardian* which explains the OCG's approach to assessment and provides examples of direct evidence and indirect evidence. Monitoring visits to your agency will usually be to assess direct evidence, but assessors may make comment about the agency's indirect evidence as it relates to practice.

A monitoring visit will be very similar to other OCG visits to your agency. The visit will include discussions with key agency staff and a review of documentation and systems. Assessments will generally include a review of the following key areas:

- care environments in residential houses (residential care)
- identification and follow up of child protection matters
- behaviour support
- placement matching and decision making
- current case planning, including permanency planning and leaving care planning and associated casework practice
- evidence of follow up on case plan tasks
- monitoring of placements and casework including education, health and birth family contact
- recruitment and assessment of carers and staff
- supervision and support of carers and staff
- continuous improvement processes
- other matters as they arise.

Assessors will ask agency staff to identify documentation or other evidence that best demonstrates the agency's practice in the above key areas. During the visit, assessors may ask your staff to clarify particular matters. If assessors are unable to access sufficient evidence of agency practice, they will ask agency staff to locate and provide relevant examples.

In assessing evidence, OCG assessors apply four basic rules to determine if the evidence provided by your agency meets the requirements. The four rules are:

1. **Validity** - is the evidence related to the system and processes being reviewed and is it sound/credible?
2. **Sufficiency** - is there enough evidence to verify that the systems/processes being reviewed are implemented in regular practice?
3. **Currency** - is the evidence current and up to date?
4. **Authenticity** - is the evidence factual/truthful and from a reliable source that directly relates to the agency and the process/system being reviewed?

At the end of the monitoring visit, assessors will provide brief verbal feedback, summarising the direct evidence reviewed, including if relevant, key areas for which evidence was not available or for which the above four rules could not be consistently applied.

## What will happen after a monitoring visit?

On return to our office, OCG assessors will finalise the assessment documentation and discuss the visit with an Accreditation and Monitoring manager. If there are no significant concerns highlighted with current agency practice, the agency will receive a letter from the Children's Guardian setting out the details of the assessment and the assessment findings.

Where areas for improvement are identified, the agency will receive a letter from the Children's Guardian and a report outlining the areas for improvement. In this case, the letter may also include a timeframe for the identified improvements to be completed.

## Further actions

The OCG may require agencies to take particular action where significant improvement is required and/or where risk to children and young people is identified. These actions may include the development of an agency action plan to address outstanding matters and/or the implementation of agency risk mitigation strategies.

The OCG may also take further action where there are ongoing concerns, these include increased monitoring, the imposition of additional conditions of accreditation and suspension or revocation of accreditation.

## More information

If you have questions about accreditation or monitoring, you can speak with the OCG staff member who is currently working with your agency. If you don't currently have a staff member involved with your agency, you can email the Accreditation and Monitoring team at [accreditation@kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au](mailto:accreditation@kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au)

For information about the Office of the Children's Guardian's other regulatory responsibilities, including the Working With Children Check, Child Safe Organisations, registration and monitoring of voluntary OOHC and accreditation and monitoring of adoption services, please visit [www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au](http://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au)

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