



MEDIA RELEASE

Child and Young Person Visitor Annual Report 2022-23

Shona Reid, Training Centre Visitor

2 November 2023

Shona Reid's **Child and Young Person Visitor Annual Report** was tabled today in South Australia's Parliament. This reported about implementation of her new Visitor Program in the residential care sector since its commencement early this year. Available staffing allowed visits to 30 houses (from a total of about 250), and 91 resident young people (the youngest aged 6) between December 2022 and June 2023.

Shona said: ***Establishing the new Visitor Program for children and young people in residential care has been a privilege. I acknowledge the important and integral role of those who are charged with the responsibility of caring for children and young people in residential care. Most importantly I must acknowledge the children and people who so openly and willing shared their lives and perspectives with me.***

The residential care sector has grown significantly. The number of children and young people housed doubled between 2017 and 2023 and the number of facilities increased by 622% between 2004 and 2017.

Shona said: ***We know that it is also preferable for children and young people to grow up in a family environment, and even better within their own family networks. There is, however, a need in specific circumstances for the utilisation of residential care settings. This may be for a number of reasons, but regardless of those reasons, we should do all we can to ensure that these places are as home-like, caring and supportive as possible.***

The voices of children and young people powerfully underpin this report. Their views are the reason Shona Reid emphasises their personal safety concerns. Over 80% of her post-visit suggestions for placement improvement related to this pervasive issue.

Shona said: ***The young people share with me and my staff the impacts, effects, aspirations, fears, wishes, and other views the children and young people raise about their day to day lives. I am a 'teller' of their stories; they are the experts about living in residential care.***

While 16.5% of young people visited were recorded as having a diagnosed mental health condition, self-reported behaviours suggest broader emotional and mental distress, as manifested by:

- struggles to regulate emotions without support
- poor sleep, with inconsistent sleeping routines and night terrors
- low self-esteem and self-worth



- panic attacks
- mental health concerns related to complex trauma, depression, anxiety, or self-harm.

While acknowledging the commitment and efforts of many people working in the sector, the report also focuses on systemic problems identified through the visiting program and associated analysis, including:

- prevalent unmet (or under met) complex individual needs that impact upon behaviour
- the often 'institutional' nature of houses and their operations (only 8 of the 32 young people we asked used the term "home" for their placement)
- staffing issues, especially in terms of stability and consistency to maximise the opportunity for building positive and trust based relationships (for example, of 30 properties visited, 67% relied on external agency providers to cover shifts)
- problems associated with 'matching' children and young people as co-residents in houses
- compromised engagement with school and other activities (only 45% of young people visited participated in full time education)
- 'care criminalisation' of dual Involved young people (i.e. those under both child protection and youth justice orders); young people spoke about police being used for behaviour management, as a first response to behaviours that would not merit the same response in family-based care (especially for property damage related matters)
- transition issues, notably with respect to preparation for leaving care (with required 'Transition from Care Plans' lacking for too many aged 15 and over).

This report also discusses the degree to which certain groups may experience residential care differently.

Shona said: ***It is incumbent on all of us – specifically the out-of-home care sector but also the wider community – to provide environments for children and young people in which they are nurtured to heal and recover from trauma and negative childhood experiences.***

Please do not hesitate to contact me directly if you have any questions or wish to discuss this report. Alternatively, your staff are welcome to contact my Principal Policy Officer, Alan Fairley, at alan.fairley@sa.gov.au or 8226 8570.