Sue Mannion Response to Information Paper May 2014

Changes to subsidy arrangements
The proposed change will further exacerbate the difficulties in recruiting and retaining foster families. Prior changes to subsidy arrangements were intended to remove, delays in approvals and to provide relief from excessive red tape. Even under the current arrangements it is a constant source of irritation to carers to have to fight constantly to get approval for expenditure that there is clear evidence is needed such as tutoring.

Focus on Kin Care
As far as I am aware there has always been a preference to leave children with birth family whenever there are family members willing and able to satisfactorily care for the child. The reality is there will always be a significant gap between the number of children requiring care outside of family and the number of family placements available. The lack of sufficient social workers available to work in the field with these highly vulnerable families will place children in even greater risk. The reality is most kin placements break down at a higher rate than foster placements leaving children even more traumatised, more challenging and less likely to succeed in school and life.

Even foster placements under the current arrangements are not receiving sufficient respite to support them leading to allegations and placement breakdowns. There are significant differences in the dynamics of foster and kin care...what is common is that these are the same children with the same challenges...without the level of training that foster parents are required to undertake kin placements will break down too often and there is significant resistance by kin to undertake formal training. I don’t see how the proposed changes will address this.

Devolving Case Management to Out of Home Agencies I totally agree however I think agencies will struggle to provide the range of services across the board. We need to be careful not to make agencies less successful at those services they currently provide.

EPR
Yes, the savings in worker time/money will be significant as well as normalising life for those children who already have settled and successful foster families. It should (along with adoption) be the goal girl for all children on long term orders who qualify. I would expect however that a flexible negotiation of future needs should be available to support these children into their future...not just a flat subsidy.

Over the 18 years I have been a foster carer I have been constantly disappointed that the promised improvements just have not eventuated. Insurance, transparency, an up to date manual, consistent practices that conform to law and natural justice, communication protocols are just some.

We have constantly supported funding injections in the hope that life for children and the families that support them will see a noticeable improvement. I hope that this time it actually might happen.

I should mention I was the President of the Foster Care Association for more than ten years...the issues relating to advocacy and independent mediation would take a book but I am happy to answer your questions.

Regards
Sue Mannion