EXPLORING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED OUT-OF-HOME CARE

Children who experience out-of-home care are among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society.

Evidence is needed to quantify the outcomes for children who have been in the WA out-of-home care system and guide the implementation of out-of-home care reforms.

To learn more about the life outcomes of children who have experienced out-of-home care, the Department of Communities commissioned Telethon Kids Institute to conduct a study.

The study

The study used linked data, to investigate selected life outcomes for children who have been in care, and to compare these outcomes with other children.

Linked data from health, education, corrective and child protection services was collected and analysed for 3 groups of children born between 1 January 1990 and 30 June 1995:

- **Care group**: 2,003 kids (1 or more periods in care (of more than 1 day)
- **Maltreatment group**: 2,761 kids (1 or more maltreatment allegations but no time in care)
- **Control group**: 9,955 kids (Matched but with no child protection contact)

Data was collected from birth until 18-23 years of age (i.e. age at 30 June 2013).

The Care group included children with wide-ranging periods in care, from two days up to 18 years:

- 54% were in care for two years or less
- 53% left care before the age of 13
- 65% had left care before turning 15.

The findings

Overall, the Care group had poorer outcomes in most areas of physical health, mental health, education and justice compared to the Maltreatment and Control groups.

Aboriginal children with child protection involvement were particularly likely to have poor outcomes in this study.
Selected outcomes

**Hospital admission rates** were:
- **2x higher** for the Care group than for the Control group
- **1.5x higher** for the Maltreatment group than for the Control group.

**Contact with a mental health service** as an adult was:
- **3x more likely** for the Care group than for the Control group
- **2.5x more likely** for the Maltreatment group than for the Control group.

Adult **death rates** (18+) were **about 3x higher** for both the Care group and the Maltreatment group than for the Control group.

The Care group was:
- **2.5x less likely to achieve WACE** and **6x less likely to be university bound** than the Control group.

The Maltreatment group was:
- **2x less likely to achieve WACE** and **3.5x less likely to be university bound** than the Control group.

Juvenile and/or adult **community-based sentences** were:
- **3.5x more likely** for the Care group than for the Control group
- **2x more likely** for the Maltreatment group than for the Control group.

**Delivery-related hospital admissions** were **2x higher** for both the Care and the Maltreatment group than for the Control group.

**Of children born to a mother who had a period in out-of-home care:**
- **40%** had a substantiated maltreatment allegation
- **25%** had an out-of-home care placement.

Conclusions

The findings show that young people who have been in care are at high risk of a range of poor outcomes, even compared to other children who have experienced adversities.

It is clear that the challenges faced by children who experience out-of-home care are complex and cannot be solved by one sector alone.