

July – Dec 2014

The PCA Families Information and Support Service had 123 contacts seeking assistance, information and support during the period 1 July to 31 December 2014. This included telephone, email and face to face contacts.

Caller/ Inquirer type	Permanent Care	Adoption (including Intercountry)	Professional	Kinship Care	Foster Care	Other
	51%	20.5%	10%	13.5%	2%	3%

The 123 contacts covered the following issues:

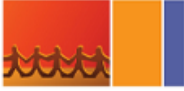
Issue Category	Number of queries *	Percentage of total queries
Legal (PCO, passports, name change, Court, adoption process)	37	22%
Seeking Resources/ Information (books, articles, other services)	37	22%
Dealing with Govt Depts/ DHS	24	14%
Seeking Therapist Referral	13	8%
Financial (includes Centrelink)	14	8.3%
General Support	11	6.5%
Child's behaviour/ Parenting	8	5%
School	7	4%
Contact / Birth Family	6	3.5%
Kinship Care	4	2.3%
Foster Care (includes conversion to PC)	4	2.3%
Other	3	2%

\* figures can incorporate multiple queries for each contact

**Issues and Trends**

Permanent care (PC) continues to rank highest in terms of type of families assisted; making up just over half the number of clients (51%) assisted for this period.

Once again the Legal category ranks highly (22%) in terms of type of presenting issue. These legal Issues reflect the themes already identified in our legal factsheets: Change of name for PC children, variations and revocation of Permanent Care Orders (PCOs), what happens to



### July – Dec 2014

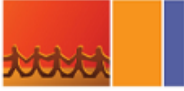
guardianship if carer dies, passports, conditions in PCOs, and differences between adoption and PC.

Also ranking at 22% were requests for information or resources on a range of issues/services. These requests were usually coupled with other issue categories, that is, not usually stand-alone enquiries. Information provided to callers included:

- Where to go to gain further assistance, eg Financial support, Family Relationship Centres, Vanish, internet links to resources, links to other resources such as the new Kinship Carers Handbook
- Suggestions of relevant books from our bookstore; or factsheets from our website
- Suggestions for other community, youth, family or legal services
- Where to find information about DHS Adoption & Permanent Care processes and procedures.

The next most commonly raised category was 'Dealing with Government Departments/ DHS' (14%). The concerns raised reflect similar themes to what PCA Families has been hearing for the past few years, and focus mostly on issues with the Adoption & Permanent Care Services (A&PC):

- Parents and carers expressing lack of understanding of DHS A&PC processes, and a lack of clarity of their rights around these processes; in particular, processes around assessment to become a Permanent Carer, court orders, and other decision-making processes. Parents and carers stated that, at times, the information given by the A & PC workers was unclear or confusing. Some callers rang wanting clarification as to whether the information they were given by A&PC teams was accurate.
- Also relating to the above issue, there was an increase in the number calls from foster carers with queries around conversion to Permanent Care.
- Parents or carers feeling unsupported by DHS; that their concerns (or their children's views) are "not being listened to"; a few also expressed frustration at what they perceived as staff inefficiency, for instance requests for information not being followed up.
- Frustration and stress created by how processes are carried out by DHS staff; for instance, stress around the slowness of decision making resulting in long periods of uncertainty and lack of stability in placements.



### July – Dec 2014

Most recently there has been an increase in callers wanting clarification about their financial entitlements as a result of a new document released by DHS, *'Financial Support Guide for home-based carers'*. Permanent Carers were seeking clarification about entitlements for the Intensive level of Care Allowance (carer reimbursement), or wondering why they were not advised of other financial supports such as for disability when taking out a PCO. This issue warrants further investigation as the guide itself is somewhat confusing for Permanent Care families; there is insufficient information around the guidelines and eligibility for the Intensive level of reimbursement.

#### **New Service introduced**

During the period July to December 2014, a new service was developed and introduced as part of the Information and Support Service. The **Peer Support Phone Volunteer Program** is designed to provide ongoing telephone support to permanent care and adoptive parents and carers through the use of peer support volunteers. Volunteers are matched with families in order to offer regular phone calls to families who are socially or geographically isolated, or unable to access other peer support groups or opportunities.

The aim of this peer support connection is to share lived experiences in a confidential and safe relationship which encourages:

- the development of resilience and confidence in the parenting role
- a sense of belonging and authentic connections which are sustainable
- realisation of hidden resources.

Currently we have one registered volunteer, and a new one in the process of becoming registered. In the next six months, PCA Families will continue to build this program by matching families to volunteers while at the same time monitoring the implementation in order to fine tune the model.

Rita Sidlauskas  
Service Development Officer  
January 2015