CHALLENGE
Community Services

Carer Support Action Plan



Message from the Head of Foster Care

I am pleased to present Challenge Community Services' Carer Support Action Plan 2026–2028. This plan outlines our commitment to strengthening partnerships with foster and relative/kin carers, improving their experiences and ensuring they feel valued, respected and supported in their vital role.

Carers are at the heart of our Foster Care program. By opening their homes, building relationships and navigating challenges, they provide children and young people with safety, connection, belonging and stability. Their contribution makes a lasting difference to the lives of those in their care.

We recognise that positive caring experiences depend on practical, reliable and responsive support. This includes timely communication, meaningful involvement in decisions and access to the information and resources carers need. Most importantly, it means listening to carers and ensuring their experiences and perspectives influence how we work.

Our CARE: Creating Conditions for Change framework recognises that strong relationships are the foundation of quality care. We are committed to creating the same conditions for carers as we seek for children and young people: an environment where they feel connected, capable, supported and valued.

We recognise the unique circumstances of relative and kinship carers and the importance of respecting family relationships, identity, culture and community. Our approach must be flexible, collaborative and responsive to individual needs.

Over the next two years, we will focus on strengthening relationships, improving communication and support, and creating genuine opportunities for carers to influence decisions. We will also seek feedback, monitor our progress and continually improve our approach.

To our foster and relative/kin carers, thank you for your compassion, commitment and invaluable contribution. Your voices matter, and we are committed to demonstrating this through meaningful action.

Together, we can build a Foster Care program where carers feel genuinely supported and respected as equal partners, strengthening outcomes and opportunities for every child and young person.



Kathryn Davies
Head of Foster Care
Challenge Community Services

Statement of Reconciliation

Challenge Community Services acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Peoples of Australia. We also acknowledge the past and commit to working with First Nations people to improve outcomes for First Nations staff, clients, families and communities through a continuously improving approach to providing culturally safe practices and service provision.



Priority Area 1
Enhancing carer satisfaction, support, and wellbeing



What we heard from carers

Carers want to be part of an OOHC system that recognises the wellbeing of them and their household, as a vital part of giving children the best possible care.
Carers want support that is tailored to their individual circumstances, acknowledges the complexity of their role, and is available proactively before issues arise, not only in response to issues.

What we are working towards

Supporting carer wellbeing, retention, and outcomes for children in care, through:

- Peer support networks and carer connection activities.
- Accessible and flexible mental health and wellbeing support.
- Access to advice, support and advocacy services.
- Responding to individual carer support and development needs in a holistic way, considering the cultural, social, and emotional components of wellbeing.
- Specialised support for relative/kin carers that acknowledges their unique circumstances.

Actions we will take

- Promote and encourage peer support networks and opportunities for carers.
- Ensure carers and their households can access flexible wellbeing support, including grief and loss support post placement.
- Ensure carers have access to, and information about, dedicated support and advice lines.
- Establish clear processes to identify and respond to the individual needs of each carer and their households, including tailored wellbeing support, training opportunities and preferred communication, with built-in opportunities for carers to provide feedback on the support they receive.
- Provide support and training that meets the unique needs of relative and kin carers.

How will this improve carer experience?

- Carers will feel **supported and connected**, increasing carer satisfaction and placement stability for children.
- Carers will have access to **practical resources** that help them build skills and knowledge to manage the challenges of caring.
- Carers and their households can access **wellbeing** advice and support whenever they need it, in ways that are flexible and responsive to their circumstances.
- Carers will feel **emotionally supported** when a child leaves a placement.

How will this improve experiences for children?

Children will feel **safe and secure** in a home environment that offers consistency and stability.
Children will have well supported and **resilient carers** who can meet their needs with patience and understanding.

Priority Area 1: Enhancing carer satisfaction, support and wellbeing				
Action	**Actions we will take**		**When will it happen**	**Who will lead this**
1.1 	**Promote and encourage peer support networks and opportunities for carers.**	1. Map and promote existing peer support opportunities available to Challenge Community Services carers. 2. Explore local and/or regional opportunities for Challenge Community Services carers to build connections and supportive relationships. 3. Explore opportunities to connect newly authorised carers for peer support and shared learning approach for newly authorised carers.	**Start Date:** January 2027 **End Date:** March 2028	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Foster Care Team • Carer Advisory Group • Challenge Community Services carers • Relevant community organisations and carer support networks
1.2 	**Ensure carers and their households can access flexible wellbeing support, including grief and loss support post placement.**	1. Review existing wellbeing supports available to carers and their households, including support for secondary trauma, and identify opportunities to strengthen and address gaps. 2. Develop a consistent and responsive approach to supporting carers and their households following the changes or endings in caring arrangements, including timely access to grief and loss support. 3. Improve access to information and resources about carer wellbeing supports, services and relevant training. 4. Explore opportunities to strengthen culturally responsive wellbeing supports for carers and their households.	**Start Date:** January 2027 **End Date:** June 2028	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Foster Care Team • Practice • Carer Advisory Group

				• Aboriginal and cultural leaderships • Wellbeing support providers
1.3 	**Ensure carers have access to and information about, dedicated support and advice lines.**	1. Review and strengthen how information about dedicated carer support and advice lines is communicated to Challenge Community Services carers. 2. Ensure all carers receive a copy of the Carer Handbook which includes information about Carers for Kids NSW and AbSec support and advice lines within carer induction and authorisation, with information reinforced through ongoing carer resources. 3. Ensure carers can easily access current information about external support, advocacy and culturally specific advice services through a dedicated resource library. 4. Strengthen staff knowledge of available carer support, advice and advocacy services to endure carers receive accurate information and appropriate guidance when seeking assistance.	**Start Date:** January 2027 **End Date:** September 2027	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Foster Care Teams • Practice • Marketing and Communications • External carer support and advocacy services
1.4	**Establish clear processes to identify and respond to the individual needs of carers and their households, including tailored wellbeing support, training opportunities and preferred communication, with built-in opportunities for carers to provide feedback on the support they receive.**	1. Review and strengthen the process for identifying the individual support needs of carers and their households throughout the carer journey. 2. Develop a consistent approach to documenting and responding to the individual wellbeing, learning and communication needs and preferences of carers and their households. 3. Embed regular, proactive opportunities for carers to review their changing support needs and provide feedback on the support they receive.	**Start Date:** January 2027 **End Date:** June 2028	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Foster Care Teams

		4. Use carer feedback to inform adjustments to individual support and identify broader opportunities for service improvement.		• Practice • Carer Advisory Group • Challenge Community Services carers
1.5	**Provide support and training that meets the unique needs of relative and kin carers.**	1. Consult with relative and kin carers to understand their experiences and use their feedback to inform the development and improvement of supports and training. 2. Review the support and training currently available to relative and kin carers and identify gaps or opportunities to better respond to their specific needs. 3. Develop or strengthen tailored information, resources and learning opportunities for relative and kin carers. 4. Ensure support planning recognises and responds to the unique family relationships, essential connections, circumstances and support needs of relative and kin carers and their households.	**Start Date:** April 2027 **End Date:** June 2028	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Foster Care Team • Practice • Aboriginal and cultural leadership • Relative and kin carers
1.6	**Strengthen proactive and trauma-informed approaches to supporting carer wellbeing, recognising the emotional impact of caring and promoting opportunities for reflection, connection and early support.**	1. Review existing approaches to recognising and responding to the emotional wellbeing of carers, including the impact of secondary trauma and cumulative stress. 2. Strengthen staff awareness and capability to recognise when carers may benefit from additional emotional wellbeing support and respond in a timely, sensitive and supportive manner. 3. Explore opportunities for carers to access reflective conversations, emotional wellbeing resources and other supports that promote resilience, connection and wellbeing.	**Start date:** July 2027 **End date:** June 2028	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Foster Care Teams • Practice • Carer Advisory Group

		4. Seek feedback from carers about their emotional wellbeing needs and experiences of support to inform ongoing improvements.		• Allied Health Team • Wellbeing providers

Priority Area 2

Strengthening our communication, transparency and accountability with carers



What we heard from carers	Carers said they want better communication and access to information, including clear updates, quick responses, and consistent, transparent decisions. They need practical details about the children they care for, the supports available, and help navigating government systems and programs. Carers also want more support, advocacy and guidance in relation to complaints and reportable conduct processes.

What we are working towards

Strengthening communication, transparency and accountability by:

- Improving access to critical information about the child that helps the carer understand and respond to the child's needs.
- Creating an online platform that centralises information for carers about their role.
- Establishing clear pathways for carers to provide feedback on their experience as carers.
- Ensuring carers have clear, accessible information about complaints and reportable conduct processes, including the support and advocacy available to them, and the relevant schemes and legislation.
- Consistent, safe, and accountable local complaints processes with clear escalation pathways for unresolved complaints.

Actions we will take

- Develop a checklist of key information to be shared with a carer when a child enters or exits the placement.
- Implement consistent use of the NSW Government issued *Code of Conduct for Authorised Carers*.
- Launch the *Carer Connect NSW* digital solution to provide carers with easy access to information and resources.
- Provide accessible ways for carers to share feedback and ensure clear accountability by communicating how feedback informs decisions, actions and service improvements.
- Ensure carers receive clear, easy-to-understand information about the reportable conduct scheme and agency processes, including their rights, responsibilities, and are aware of the support and advocacy available to them during reportable conduct and complaints processes.
- Ensure systems and processes are in place to respond to, and resolve complaints made by carers in a fair, safe and transparent way.

How will this improve carer experience?

- Carers will receive **clear and consistent communication**, with information that is easy to find and access when needed.
- Carers will feel they have the **information** they need to understand and provide for the child's individual needs and feel confident in their role to help the child thrive.
- Carers will have clear **guidance on complaints** and reportable conduct processes, know their rights and responsibilities, and can access support when needed.

How will this improve experiences for children?	Children will feel **safe, cared for and supported** by carers who have all the important information about them and their needs. Children will have the **advocacy and support** that they need to access the right services.

Priority Area 2: Strengthening our communication, transparency and accountability with carers				
Action	**Actions we will take**		**When will it happen**	**Who will lead this**
2.1	**Develop a checklist of key information to be shared with a carer when a child enters or exits the placement.**	1. Consult with carers and staff to identify the information that should be included and ensure the checklists are practical, accessible and responsive to carer needs. 2. Develop and implement a consistent checklist to support timely information sharing and meaningful conversations with carers when a child or young person enters their care. 3. Develop and implement a consistent checklist to support timely information sharing, meaningful conversations and appropriate support for carers when a child or young person leaves their care.	**State Date:** January 2027 **End Date:** September 2027	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Foster Care Teams • Practice • Challenge Community Services carers • Carer Advisory Group
2.2	**Implement consistent use of the NSW Government issued *Code of Conduct for Authorised Carers*.**	1. Ensure that all agencies across the sector are using the same Minister approved *Code of Conduct for Authorised Carers.* 2. Continue to use the Minsters approved *Code of Conduct for Authorised Carers* ensuring all authorised carers review and acknowledge the Code at least annually. 3. Ensure all Challenge Community Services carers receive an updated Code of Conduct for Authorised Carers whenever revisions are made, with clear information and appropriate support to understand the changes and their responsibilities. 4. Ensure relevant staff understand the requirements of the *Code of Conduct for Authorised Carers* and their responsibilities in supporting carers to meet these requirements.	**Start Date:** Jan 2026 **End Date:** Jan 2027	**Lead:** • DCJ Child Protection and Permanency • Carer Action Plan Project Lead **Partners:** • Foster Care Leadership • Foster Care Teams • Practice

2.3	**Launch the *Carer Connect NSW* digital solution to provide carers with easy access to information and resources.**	1. DCJ to design, develop and deliver the *Carer Connect NSW* digital solution, allowing carers to access in one centralised place: • training opportunities, • practical resources and fact sheets, • available services and supports, • multimedia content and live events. 2. Promote Carer Connect NSW to Challenge Community Services carers and embed information about the platform and how to access it within relevant carer induction, authorisation and ongoing support processes. 3. Provide practical assistance to carers who require support to access and use Carer Connect NSW, recognising individual digital access and capability needs.	**Start Date:** Aug 2026 **End Date:** Jan 2027	**Lead:** • DCJ Child Protection and Permanency • Carer Action Plan Project Lead Partners: • Foster Care Leadership • Foster Care Teams • Marketing and Communications • Quality and Practice
2.4	**Provide accessible ways for carers to share feedback and ensure clear accountability by communicating how feedback informs decisions, actions and service improvements.**	1. Conduct the *Biennial OOHC Carer Survey* based on metrics that have been developed through consultation with carers. 2. Collect and analyse carer survey feedback to identify the main themes, trends and carers' experiences. 3. Promote and encourage Challenge Community Services carers' participation in the Biennial OOHC Carer Survey. 4. Review available survey findings to identify themes, trends and opportunities relevant to Challenge Community Services carers and to inform service improvement. 5. Communicate relevant findings and resulting improvement actions to carers, demonstrating how carer feedback has informed change. 6. Strengthen accessible and ongoing opportunities for Challenge Community Services carers to share feedback, raise concerns and	**Start Date:** Sept 2026 **End Date** June 2028 (Ongoing)	**Lead:** • DCJ Child Protection and Permanency • Carer Action Plan Project Lead **Partners:** • Foster Care Leadership • Practice • Carer Advisory Group • Marketing and Communications

		contribute to service improvements outside formal survey processes.		• Challenge Community Services carers
2.5 	**Ensure carers receive clear, easy-to-understand information about the reportable conduct scheme and agency processes, including their rights, responsibilities, and the support and advocacy available to them during reportable conduct and complaints processes.**	1. Review existing information and resources provided to carers about reportable conduct and complaints processes to ensure they are clear, accessible and consistent. 2. Ensure carers receive clear information about their rights and responsibilities, what to expect throughout reportable conduct and complaints processes and how to access available support and advocacy. 3. Ensure prospective and authorised carers receive clear information about reportable conduct and complaints processes from the early stages of recruitment and throughout induction, authorisation and ongoing support. 4. Review and audit relevant processes and carer resources to confirm that information is being provided consistently and identify opportunities for improvement.	**State Date:** January 2027 **End Date:** December 2027	**Lead:** • Foster Care leadership • Carer Action Plan Project Lead **Partners:** • Foster Care Teams • Carer Advisory Group • Quality and Safeguarding
2.6 	**Ensure systems and processes are in place to respond to, and resolve complaints made by carers in a fair, safe and transparent way.**	1. Undertake activities to support implementation of the published *Complaint Management Policy Framework – Child Protection and Out-of-Home Care* (finalised December 2025). This policy framework outlines how DCJ manages complaints about child protection and OOHC matters that: • Embeds fairness, transparency and accountability, • Outlines clear timeframes for complaint processes, • Supports complaints being raised in a safe and accessible way, without fear of retribution,	**Start Date:** Jan 2026 **End Date:** Dec 2026	**Lead:** • DCJ Child and Family • Carer Action Plan Project Lead **Partners:** • Quality and Safeguarding • Foster Care leadership

		• Outlines clear escalation and review pathways, including internal and external reviews, • Enables DCJ to retain authority to review, intervene, or respond directly to complaints where necessary, particularly when complainants do not feel safe or comfortable approaching their contracted service provider, • Includes complainant satisfaction mechanisms. 2. Review Challenge Community Services' existing carer complaints processes to identify opportunities to strengthen alignment with the principles of fairness, transparency, accountability, accessibility and safety. 3. Continue to ensure carers have clear and accessible information about how to raise a complaint, expected timeframes, escalation and review pathways and available internal and external complaints and advocacy options. 4. Strengthen mechanisms for seeking carer feedback on their experiences of the complaints process and use this feedback to inform continuous improvement. 5. Review and strengthen processes for providing carers with timely updates, clear communication about complaint outcomes and appropriate support throughout the complaints process, while maintaining confidentiality and procedural fairness.		• Practice Team • Carer Advisory Group

Priority Area 3

Elevating carer voice through genuine partnerships



What we heard from carers	Carers told us that they want to be treated as genuine partners in the child's care team. They want to be listened to, and their experiences and expertise to be considered when making decisions about the children they care for. Carers want the chance to be consulted about programs and policies that impact them, their families, and the children they care for.

What we are working towards

Elevating carer voices through:

- Policies and practices that support carer choice and genuine partnership including participation and decision making, clear and accessible information, and providing opportunities for feedback.
- Providing opportunities for carers to be involved in shaping programs and initiatives that impact them and the children they care for.
- Partnering with carers, family, kin, and community to make decisions for Aboriginal children that respect and protect children's right to stay connected to family, community, country, and culture.
- Partnering with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) families and carers to understand the cultural identity and needs of the child and ensuring culture is represented in decision-making and case planning.

Actions we will take

- Ensure carers have access to clear and accessible information about their role, rights and responsibilities.
- Provide carers with information about decision making roles and responsibilities, including delegations and approvals.
- Strengthen guidance for caseworkers and carers on when and how to include carers in decision-making.
- Create structured feedback opportunities for carers to share their views and help in the development and improvement of programs and initiatives related to out-of-home care carers.
- Strengthen partnerships with carers, family, kin and community members to ensure service delivery and planning for Aboriginal and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) children reflect the voices of those who know the child and their culture best.

How will this improve carer experience?

- Carers will feel recognised as **partners** in the child's care team, and valued for their knowledge, skills, and experience.
- Carers will be actively **involved in decisions** that affect the child's wellbeing and daily life.
- Carers will see more opportunities to be involved in **shaping programs** and initiatives that impact their role, and the children they care for.

How will this improve experiences for children?	Children will feel **cared for and supported** by everyone involved.Children will see the important adults in their life **connecting** with one another. Children will have **positive relationships** with their carer, care team, family and people that are important to them.

Priority Area 3: Elevating carer voice through genuine partnerships				
Action	**Actions we will take**		**When will it happen**	**Who will lead this**
3.1 	**Ensure carers have access to clear and accessible information about their role, rights and responsibilities.**	1. DCJ will undertake a comprehensive review and update of the *Caring for Kids Guide* to ensure it is accurate, relevant, and accessible for carers. 2. Promote the updated *Caring for Kids Guide* to Challenge Community Services carers once released. 3. Embed the updated *Caring for Kids Guide* within relevant Challenge Community Services carer induction, authorisation and ongoing support processes, ensuring carers are supported to understand and use the information. 4. Review Challenge Community Services carer resources and information to ensure they are consistent with and appropriately reference the updated *Caring for Kids Guide.*	**Start date:** May 2026 **End date:** December 2026 (Ongoing reviews)	**Lead:** • DCJ Child Protection and Permanency • Carer Action Plan Project Lead **Partners:** • Foster Care Leadership • Quality and Practice • Marketing and Communications
3.2	**Provide carers with information about decision making roles and responsibilities, including delegations and approval.**	1. Review and strengthen information provided to carers about decision-making roles, responsibilities, delegations and approval processes. 2. Develop or update clear, accessible guidance to support carers in understanding their decision-making responsibilities, what decisions they can make, what requires approval and who to contact for guidance or approval. 3. Embed information about decision-making responsibilities within relevant carer induction, authorisation and ongoing support processes.	**Start date:** January 2027 **End date:** September 2027	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Foster Care Teams • Practice • Carer Advisory Group

				• Challenge Community Services carers
3.3	**Strengthen guidance for caseworkers and carers on when and how to include carers in decision-making.**	1. Review current guidance and practice regarding carer involvement in decisions about children and young people in their care. 2. Ensure carers and relevant staff use Challenge Community Services' Placement Agreement to support clear expectations about when and how carers are involved in decision-making. 3. Embed expectations for meaningful and collaborative carer involvement in decision-making within relevant staff and carer resources, induction and ongoing practice development. 4. Seek feedback from carers about their experiences of involvement in decision-making and use this to identify opportunities to strengthen practice.	**Start date:** January 2027 **End date:** December 2027	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Foster Care Teams • Practice • Carer Advisory Group • Challenge Community Services carers
3.4 	**Create structured feedback opportunities for carers to share their views and help in the development and improvement of programs and initiatives related to carers.**	1. Establish regular and structured opportunities for carers to contribute to the development, review and improvement of carer-related programs, resources and initiatives. 2. Explore and co-design a Carer Advisory Group, Community of Practice or similar advisory mechanism with carers to strengthen ongoing participation, shared learning and collaborative partnerships. 3. Develop mechanisms to communicate to carers how their feedback and participation have influenced decisions, improvements and outcomes.	**Start Date:** January 2027 **End Date:** June 2028	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Foster Care Teams • Practice • Carer Advisory Group

				• Challenge Community Services carers
3.5	**Strengthen partnerships with carers, family, kin and community members to ensure service delivery and planning for Aboriginal and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) children reflect the voices of those who know the child and their culture best.**	1. Review and strengthen opportunities for carers, families, kin and relevant community members to contribute to planning and decision-making for Aboriginal and CALD children and young people. 2. Strengthen culturally responsive practice by actively seeking, valuing and incorporating knowledge and perspectives of carers, families, kin and community members into planning and service delivery. 3. Consult with Aboriginal and CALD carers, families and relevant stakeholders to identify barriers to meaningful participation and opportunities to strengthen culturally safe and inclusive practice. 4. Strengthen relationships with Aboriginal organisations and culturally relevant community partners to support culturally informed planning, meaningful participation and children's connections to family, community and culture.	**Start Date:** April 2027 **End Date:** June 2028 (ongoing)	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Aboriginal and Cultural Leadership • Foster Care teams • Practice • Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) • relevant multicultural organisations • carers, families and kin

Priority Area 4

Embedding relational approaches



What we heard from carers	Carers told us they want to be treated with respect and to be part of the care team. They said they want a relationship with the child's caseworker that is genuine and built on honesty and trust. Parents, young people and many carers said it is important for families, carers, and caseworkers to have good relationships because these connections help children.

What we are working towards

Focusing on relationships, rebuilding trust, and strengthening support for carers through:

- Casework that is skilled, consistent, explainable and responds to both carers and children's needs.
- Casework that actively involves carers and families, valuing their role and input in the child's life and helps to build strong connections with these and other significant people.
- Casework and leadership teams that understand and promote the importance of culture and make sure cultural connections are formed and/or continue.

Actions we will take

- DCJ will develop and implement a sector-wide Partnership Agreement, co-designed with carers and OOHC agencies, that sets out a shared commitment to working with carers in alignment with the Guiding Principles.
- Provide new and existing caseworkers with specific training that equips them with the knowledge, attitude and skills required to better support carers.
- Strengthen caseworker and leadership cultural capability.
- Organise carer appreciation events and recognition activities.
- Ensure carers know how to contact their local leadership teams and increase opportunities for carers to connect with them.
- Help children and carers safely maintain connections with the child's family and other important people, including previous carers, and when needed, organise activities that promote healing, and help create or strengthen relationships.
- Support all carers of Aboriginal children to build and maintain strong relationships that help the child stay connected to their culture, Country, and community.

How will this improve carer experience?

- Carers will feel **respected, valued, and included** as an important member of the child's care team and have trust and confidence in their relationship with the casework team.
- Carers will see **open and honest** communication with the child's caseworker and care team.
- Carers will feel supported and confident to **build relationships and connections** with the child's family in ways that meet the unique circumstances of each child.

How will this improve experiences for children in out-of-home care?	Children will feel **cared for and supported** by everyone involved. Children will see the important adults in their life **connecting** with one another. Children will have **positive relationships** with their carer, care team, family and people that are important to them.

Priority Area 4: Embedding relational approaches				
Action	**Actions we will take**		**When will it happen**	**Who will lead this**
4.1 	**DCJ will develop and implement a sector-wide Partnership Agreement, co-designed with carers and OOHC agencies, that sets out a shared commitment to working with carers in alignment with the Guiding Principles.**	1. DCJ will lead the development of a co-designed sector wide Partnership Agreement between agencies and carers. 2. Actively participate in DCJ led consultation and co-design activities for the sector-wide Partnership Agreement 3. Support opportunities for Challenge Community Services carers to contribute their perspectives and experiences to the co-design process. 4. Following finalisation, review Challenge Community Services practices and processes against the Partnership Agreement and identify any changes required to support implementation. 5. Promote the finalised Partnership Agreement to Challenge Community Services carers and relevant staff and embed its principles and shared commitments within relevant resources, induction and ongoing practice.	**Start Date:** Sept 2026 **End Date:** Aug 2027	**Lead:** • Child Protection and Permanency • Carer Action Plan Project Lead **Partners:** • Carers • OOHC agencies • Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) • State Aboriginal Reference Group (ARG) • NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation (AbSec) • Challenge Foster Care Leadership • Practice • Carer Advisory Group • Challenge Community Services Board

4.2	**Provide new and existing caseworkers with specific training and resources that equips them with the knowledge, attitude, and skills required to better support carers.**	1. Review existing induction, training and practice development for relevant Foster Care staff and leaders to identify opportunities to strengthen respectful, collaborative and supportive relationships with carers. 2. Identify and address gaps in relevant staff learning and practice development relating to supporting carers and building collaborative partnerships. 3. Use carer feedback and experiences to inform the development and continuous improvement of relevant Foster Care staff and leader learning and practice resources. 4. Embed ongoing opportunities for Foster Care staff and leaders to strengthen and reflect on their practice when working collaboratively with carers.	**Start Date:** April 2027 **End Date:** June 2028 (ongoing)	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Quality and Practice • Foster Care Teams • Carer Advisory Group • Challenge Community Services carers
4.3	**Strengthen caseworker and leadership cultural capability.**	1. Review existing cultural capability learning and practice development available to Foster Care staff and leaders to identify strengths and gaps. 2. Strengthen cultural capability learning and practice development for Foster Care staff and leaders, informed by identified needs and guidance from relevant Aboriginal and culturally diverse stakeholders. 3. Embed opportunities for ongoing reflection and development of culturally responsive practice within supervision, practice development and leadership processes. 4. Seek feedback from Aboriginal and CALD carers about their experiences of culturally responsive support and use this feedback to inform continuous improvement.	**Start Date:** April 2027 **End Date:** June 2028 (ongoing)	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Aboriginal and Cultural Leadership • Practice • Aboriginal and CALD carers

				• relevant Aboriginal and multicultural organisations
4.4 	**Organise carer appreciation events and recognition activities.**	1. Consult with carers to understand how they would like their contributions to be recognised and celebrated. 2. Develop and implement a consistent approach to carer appreciation and recognition across Challenge Community Services Foster Care, informed by carer feedback. 3. Provide opportunities throughout the year to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of carers, including relevant carer recognition events and milestones.	**Start Date:** January 2027 **End Date:** June 2028 (ongoing)	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Foster Care teams • Carer Advisory Group • Challenge Community Services carers • Marketing and Communications
4.5	**Ensure carers know how to contact their local leadership teams and increase opportunities for carers to connect with them.**	1. Ensure carers have clear and current information about their local Foster Care leadership team, including how and when they can make contact. 2. Establish regular opportunities for carers to connect directly with local Foster Care leaders outside of individual case or complaint processes. 3. Consult with carers about how they would prefer to engage with local leadership and use this feedback to shape future engagement opportunities. 4. Strengthen processes for providing carers with timely and consistent information about changes to their care team,	**Start Date:** January 2027 **End Date:** June 2028 (ongoing)	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Foster Care teams • Carer Advisory Group

		relevant organisational updates and sector developments that may affect their caring role.		• Challenge Community Services carers • Marketing and Communications
4.6	**Help children and carers safely maintain connections with the child's family and other important people, including any previous carers, and when needed, organise activities that promote healing, and help create or strengthen relationships.**	1. Review and strengthen practice guidance for carers and staff to support children and young people to safely maintain essential connections with family, previous carers and other people who are important to them. 2. Ensure carers receive appropriate information, guidance and practical support to facilitate safe and meaningful connections with family and other significant people. 3. Strengthen planning for transitions and changes in care arrangements to support continuity of important relationships, including relationships with previous carers where appropriate and safe. 4. Identify and support opportunities for activities or interventions that promote healing and help children and young people build, repair or strengthen important relationships.	**Start Date:** April 2027 **End Date:** June 2028 (ongoing)	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Foster Care teams • Practice • Aboriginal and Cultural Leadership • carers, children and young people, families and kin
4.7	**Support all carers of Aboriginal children to build and maintain strong relationships that help the child stay connected to their culture, Country, and community.**	1. Review and strengthen how carers of Aboriginal children and young people are supported to understand and actively contribute to maintaining children's and young people's connections to culture, Country, family and community, including clarifying shared responsibilities between carers and Foster Care teams and strengthening practical support to implement Cultural Support Plans.	**Start Date:** April 2027 **End Date:** June 2028 (ongoing)	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:**

		2. Ensure carers have access to culturally appropriate information, resources, guidance and support to help them strengthen and maintain these connections. 3. Strengthen partnerships with Aboriginal families, kin, communities and relevant Aboriginal organisations to support carers in maintaining meaningful cultural connections for children and young people. 4. Seek feedback from carers of Aboriginal children and young people and relevant Aboriginal stakeholders to identify barriers and opportunities to strengthen cultural connection and support.		• Aboriginal and Cultural Leadership • Foster Care teams • Aboriginal families and kin • Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) • relevant Aboriginal community representatives, carers of Aboriginal children and young people • DCJ

Priority Area 5

Improved financial assistance

What we heard from carers

Carers want clear, easy-to-understand information about the financial support available for the children in their care. This includes information about the payments and benefits they receive for the child and what they can access as carers from both state and federal systems. They also told us they need faster reimbursement for eligible and approved out-of-pocket expenses.

What we are working towards

Making it easier for carers to find and understand financial information and options by:

- Sharing information about care allowances and financial support.
- Having financial information in a centralised location and making sure carers know where to find it.
- Being transparent about reimbursements, including the approval process and associated timeframes.
- Guiding carers to identify the payments and benefits available for the child and themselves across state and federal systems.

Actions we will take

- Send carers an annual letter, aligned with the timing of the child's case plan meeting, outlining a breakdown of the care allowance they receive for the child, other financial support, and where applicable, the specific packages they receive.
- Increase awareness of the published information about financial assistance, including state and commonwealth information, as outlined on the NSW Government website and in the *Caring for Kids Guide*.
- Improve information to carers about the reimbursement process for eligible expenses, including expected timeframes.
- Advocate for carers via the Safe and Supported: National Framework for protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031.

How will this improve carer experience?

- Carers will have **clarity about allowances** for the child, their agency's reimbursement processes, and potential commonwealth benefits and payments.
- Carers can **plan effectively** with transparent timeframes and centralised financial information, helping them manage household budgets and prepare for extra expenses.
- Carers receive financial support through **streamlined systems** that minimise delays and confusion.

How will this improve experiences for children?

- Children will have their everyday **needs met** while also benefiting from the State and Commonwealth financial support they are entitled to.
- Children have access to **opportunities and experiences** that promote their wellbeing and development.

Priority Area 5: Improved financial assistance				
Action	**Actions we will take**		**When will it happen**	**Who will lead this**
5.1	**Send carers an annual letter, aligned with the timing of the child's case plan meeting, outlining a breakdown of the care allowance they receive for the child, other financial support, and where applicable, the specific packages they receive.**	1. Develop and implement a consistent process for providing carers with an annual written breakdown of their care allowance other financial supports and applicable packages, aligned with the timing of the child or young person's case plan meeting. 2. Ensure the information provided is clear and accessible and identifies who carers can contact if they have questions or require clarification about financial support. 3. Establish a process to monitor whether annual financial information has been provided to carers consistently and within the required timeframe.	**Start date:** January 2027 **End date:** June 2028 (ongoing)	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Finance • Quality and Practice • Carer Advisory Group
5.2	**Increase awareness of available financial assistance, including state and commonwealth supports, as outlined on the NSW Government website and in the *Caring for Kids Guide.***	1. DCJ will make financial information clear and easy to find on the DCJ and NSW government website and the *Carer Connect NSW* digital solution platform, including links to available commonwealth supports (*see action 2.3*). 2. DCJ will ensure the sites provide clear and accurate information on: • child related payments and allowances for DCJ carers, • what the care allowance covers, • the supports available from the Commonwealth Government, including the grandparents, foster, and relative kin carer advice line, • where OOHC carers can go if they need additional assistance with navigating and understanding financial aspects of their role. 3. DCJ to ensure the financial section of the *Caring for Kids Guide* is updated with contemporary advice.	**Start date:** Aug 2026 **End date:** May 2027 (Ongoing updates)	**Lead:** • DCJ Child Protection and Permanency • Carer Action Plan Project Lead **Partners:** • Foster Care Leadership • Finance • Foster Care Teams • Quality and Practice • Marketing and Communications

		4. Promote current information about available state and Commonwealth financial assistance to Challenge Community Services carers, including relevant NSW Government resources, the Caring for Kids Guide and Carer Connect NSW once available. 5. Embed information about available financial assistance and where to access further advice within relevant carer induction, authorisation and ongoing support processes. 6. Ensure carers know who to contact within Challenge Community Services , or externally where appropriate if they require assistance to understand or navigate the financial supports available to them. 7. Review Challenge Community Services carer information and resources following updates by DCJ to ensure financial information and links remain current and consistent with sector guidance. 8. Strengthen staff knowledge of carer allowances, available financial assistance and reimbursement processes to support accurate, consistent and timely guidance to carers.		
5.3	**Improve information to carers about the reimbursement processes for eligible expenses, including expected timeframes.**	1. Review and strengthen information provided to carers about eligible expenses and Challenge Community Services' reimbursement processes, including required documentation and expected timeframes. 2. Develop or update clear and accessible guidance for carers outlining how to submit reimbursement requests, what information is required, expected processing timeframes and who to contact for assistance. 3. Review reimbursement processes and timeframes to identify any barriers, inconsistencies or opportunities to improve the carer experience.	**Start date:** January 2027 **End date:** December 2027	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Finance **Partners:** • Foster Care Leadership • Foster Care teams • Quality and Practice • Marketing and Communications

				• Carer Advisory Group
5.4 	**Advocate for carers via Safe and Supported: The National Framework for protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031.**	1. DCJ will advocate for the needs, supports, and entitlements of NSW OOHC carers through the *Safe and Supported National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031* working group. 2. Seek and capture the experiences and perspectives of Challenge Community Services carers regarding support, entitlements and systemic barriers, and raise identified themes through appropriate DCJ and sector engagement mechanisms to contribute to broader advocacy for OOHC carers.	**Start date:** April 2026 **End date:** April 2028 (Ongoing)	**Lead:** • DCJ Child Protection and Permanency • Carer Action Plan Project Lead **Partners:** • Foster Care Leadership • Carer Advisory Group • Quality and Practice • Challenge Community Services carers

Priority Area 6

Building carer capability through accessible and responsive training

What we heard from carers	Carers said training is essential for preparing new carers for the role and should start during recruitment and onboarding to build confidence and capability. Carers want ongoing, practical, and relevant training that adapts to the changing needs of children and carers and is delivered in flexible, accessible ways.

What we are working towards

Helping new and existing carers to build skills, confidence, and capability by offering:

- Early and ongoing access to practical and relevant training delivered in ways that are flexible and accessible.
- Training that demonstrates how to recognise and respond to the effects of trauma (trauma-informed training).
- Training to build understanding and respect for diverse cultural backgrounds, identities, and experiences, to support the child's identity.
- Support to facilitate Family Time and help to keep children connected with their families, building and maintaining positive relationships with people that matter to them.

Actions we will take

- Ensure carers have access to relevant, flexibly delivered training that meets their needs, and those of the children in their care, and is available at all stages of the caring journey.
- Ensure carers understand and are committed to meeting the minimum training requirements to fulfil their role and meet the needs of children in their care.
- Provide carers with access to training on:
    - recognising the signs and impact of trauma and providing trauma-informed care,
    - developing cultural capability – supporting them to understand and meet the cultural needs of children in their care,
    - building relationships with families,
    - facilitating Family Time,
    - supporting children to return to family.

How will this improve carer experience?

- Carers will have access to **flexible, ongoing training opportunities** that build skills, confidence, and cultural capability, helping them provide trauma-informed and child-centred care.
- Carers will build **confidence** in responding to children's behaviours and emotions in practical and supportive ways and be better prepared for everyday and unexpected challenges.
- Carers will help children **maintain important bonds** and support safe reunification when possible.

How will this improve experiences for children?	Children will have **care** that responds to their individual behaviours and emotions in supportive ways and adapts to their changing needs. Children will see the important adults in their life **connecting** with one another. Children will be **connected** to the people that matter to them. Children will **feel safe** knowing their culture and identity is respected.

Priority Area 6: Building carer capability through accessible and responsive training				
Action	**Actions we will take**		**When will it happen**	**Who will lead this**
6.1 	**Ensure carers have access to relevant, flexibly delivered training that meets their needs, and those of the children in their care, and is available at all stages of the caring journey.**	1. Review and map existing carer training and learning opportunities to identify gaps in training across different stages of the caring journey and in relation to the needs of children and young people. 2. Consult with carers to identify their learning and development needs, preferred training formats, accessibility requirements and barriers to participation. 3. Develop and maintain a responsive carer learning and development approach that provides access to relevant and flexibly delivered training at different stages of the caring journey. 4. Regularly seek carer feedback on the relevance, accessibility and effectiveness of training and use this feedback to inform future learning opportunities.	**Start Date:** January 2027 **End Date:** June 2028 (ongoing)	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Practice • Foster Care Teams • Carer Advisory Group • Challenge Community Services carers
6.2	**Ensure carers understand and are committed to meeting the minimum training requirements to fulfil their role and meet the needs of children in their care.**	1. Review and clearly define the minimum training requirements for Challenge Community Services carers across the caring journey. 2. Ensure carers receive clear information about mandatory training requirements, when they are required and their responsibilities for completing and maintaining required learning. 3. Implement or strengthen processes for monitoring carer training completion and identifying carers who require additional support to meet minimum requirements. 4. Provide timely reminders and support to carers to complete required training, including addressing barriers that may affect participation.	**Start Date:** January 2027 **End Date:** December 2027 (ongoing monitoring)	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Practice • Foster Care teams • Carer Compliance Team
6.3 	**Provide carers with access to training on:**	1. Review existing carer training to ensure carers have access to learning that supports them to recognise the signs and impacts of trauma and provide trauma-informed care.	**Start Date:** April 2027	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead

	• **recognising the signs and impact of trauma and providing trauma-informed care.**	2. Identify and address any gaps in trauma-informed learning available to carers, including access to additional learning where the needs of a child or young person require it. 3. Embed trauma-informed learning within a broader carer learning and development pathway and provide opportunities for carers to refresh and strengthen their knowledge over time.	**End Date:** June 2028 (ongoing)	• Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Practice • Foster Care teams • Carer Advisory Group • relevant trauma-informed training providers
6.4 	**Provide carers with access to training on:** • **developing cultural capability – supporting them to understand and meet the cultural needs of children in their care.**	1. Review existing carer training and resources to ensure carers have access to learning that builds their cultural capability and supports them to understand and meet the cultural needs of children and young people in their care. 2. Identify and address gaps in cultural capability learning for carers, including access to culturally relevant learning, resources and supported opportunities for carers to learn alongside children and young people in ways that respond to their individual needs, identities and cultural connections. 3. Engage with Aboriginal and culturally diverse stakeholders, relevant community organisations and carers to inform the development and continuous improvement of culturally responsive learning and resources.	**Start Date:** April 2027 **End Date:** June 2028 (ongoing)	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Aboriginal and Cultural Leadership • Practice • Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) • relevant multicultural organisations, Challenge Community Services carers

6.5 	**Provide carers with access to training on:** • **building relationships with families.** • **facilitating Family Time.** • **supporting children to return to family.**	1. Review existing carer training and resources to ensure carers have access to learning that supports them to build positive relationships with families, facilitate Family Time and support children and young people to return to family. 2. Identify and address gaps in carer learning and resources across these areas, including practical guidance that supports carers to apply the learning in their caring role. 3. Ensure learning reflects relational and family- inclusive practice and supports carers to understand the important role they play in maintaining and strengthening children's relationships with their families. 4. Seek feedback from carers and, where appropriate, families about the support, knowledge and skills carers need to build relationships with families, facilitate Family Time and support restoration.	**Start Date:** April 2027 **End Date:** June 2028 (ongoing)	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Quality and Practice • Foster Care teams • Carer Advisory Group • families and kin, Challenge Community Services carers

Priority Area 7

Creating an agile recruitment and onboarding experience



What we heard from carers

We need a diverse range of carers to meet the varied permanency needs of children in OOHC. This includes carers who can provide respite placements, help children return to family, and offer emergency care when needed.
The recruitment process should be transparent, streamlined, and respectful of culture. It should be accompanied by training and onboarding that gives carers the knowledge, skills, and confidence to care for children in OOHC.

What we are working towards

Finding, assessing, authorising and onboarding a range of OOHC carers through:

- Recruitment activities that look for specific types of carers, such as those to support children returning to family, children with higher needs, or those needing respite or emergency care.
- Simplified, transparent and consistent end-to-end recruitment and authorisation processes, that are easy to follow and creates a smooth and supportive experience for applicants.
- Culturally sensitive and respectful assessments.
- Onboarding for new carers that ensures they understand what being a carer involves, helps them feel prepared for the challenges and responsibilities, provides the training and support they need in their new role and connects them to other carers.

Actions we will take

- Implement targeted foster care recruitment campaigns to recruit new OOHC carers to meet the varied permanency needs of children in OOHC.
- Improve carer recruitment, assessment and onboarding processes by providing transparent steps and timeframes, reducing barriers and delays, and ensuring carers receive timely information and updates throughout the process.
- Where possible, ensure Aboriginal and CALD applicants are assessed using culturally responsive assessment processes and tools.
- Launch the *Carer Connect NSW* digital solution showing cross-sector carer availability and carer characteristics to support better placement matching.
- Ensure that carer support needs identified during assessment are clearly documented and responded to within the first 12 months of authorisation.

How will this improve carer experience?

- All carers will have a **transparent, consistent, and culturally responsive** recruitment journey from application to authorisation that is less overwhelming and keeps them engaged throughout.
- New carers will feel more **confident and supported** to take on a placement and have a better understanding of their role.

How will this improve experiences for children?

Children will have more **home-based placement options**, with carers who are better prepared and supported to meet their needs.

Priority Area 7: Creating an agile recruitment and onboarding experience				
Action	**Actions we will take**		**When will it happen**	**Who will lead this**
7.1	**Implement targeted foster care recruitment campaigns to recruit new OOHC carers to meet the varied permanency needs of children in OOHC**	1. Review carer recruitment needs across Challenge Community Services Foster Care to identify priority locations, carer cohorts and the varied permanency needs of children and young people requiring care. 2. Develop and implement targeted carer recruitment campaigns informed by identified care and permanency needs, including opportunities to reach a diverse range oof prospective carers. 3. Strengthen collaboration between Foster Care and Marketing to ensure recruitment messaging accurately reflects current carer needs and the realities of the caring role. 4. Monitor recruitment campaign outcomes to understand which approaches are effective and use this information to inform future recruitment activities. 5. Strengthen engagement with DCJ and relevant placement coordination teams to understand emerging care and permanency needs and inform targeted carer recruitment priorities.	**Start date:** January 2027 **End date:** June 2028 (ongoing)	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Carer Compliance Team • Marketing and Communications • DCJ • Practice
7.2	**Improve carer recruitment, assessment and onboarding processes by providing transparent steps and timeframes, reducing barriers and delays, and ensuring carers receive timely information and updates throughout each process.**	1. Review the end-to-end recruitment, assessment and onboarding journey to identify barriers, delays and opportunities to improve the prospective carer experience. 2. Develop clear and accessible information for prospective carers outlining each stage of recruitment, assessment and onboarding, including indicative timeframes and what they can expect throughout the process.	**Start date:** January 2027 **End date:** December 2027	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:**

		3. Strengthen processes for providing prospective carers with regular and timely updates about the progress of their applications, including where delays occur. 4. Seek feedback from newly authorised carers about their recruitment, assessment and onboarding experiences and use this feedback to inform continuous improvement.		• Carer Compliance Team • Foster Care teams • Practice • Marketing and Communications • newly authorised carers
7.3	**Where possible, ensure Aboriginal and CALD applicants are assessed using culturally responsive assessment processes and tools.**	1. Review current assessment processes and tools used with Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) carer applicants to identify opportunities to strengthen culturally responsive practice. 2. Engage with relevant Aboriginal and CALD stakeholders to inform improvements to carer assessment processes, tools and practices. 3. Strengthen guidance and capability for staff undertaking carer assessments to support culturally safe and responsive assessment practices. 4. Seek feedback from Aboriginal and CALD applicants and carers about their assessment experiences and use this to inform continuous improvement.	**Start date:** April 2027 **End date:** June 2028	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Carer Compliance Team • Aboriginal and Cultural Leadership • Practice • Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) • relevant multicultural organisations, Aboriginal and CALD carers

7.4 	**Launch the *Carer Connect NSW* digital solution showing cross-sector carer availability and characteristics to support better placement matching.**	1. DCJ to design, develop, and deliver the *Carer Connect NSW* digital solution to improve visibility of foster carer availability and the streamlining of carer information to support better criteria-based placement matching. 2. Prepare for implementation of Carer Connect NSW by reviewing relevant Challenge Community Services carer information and processes to support the accuracy and currency of carer availability and characteristics. 3. Following the release of relevant Carer Connect NSW functionality and guidance, embed the platform within applicable Challenge Community Services placement matching and carer management processes. 4. Establish a process to support the ongoing accuracy and currency of Challenge Community Services carer information used within Carer Connect NSW.	**Start date:** May 2026 **End date:** Jan 2027	**Lead:** • DCJ Child and Family • DCJ Child Protection and Permanency • Carer Action Plan Project Lead **Partners:** • Foster Care Leadership • Carer Compliance Team • Foster Care Teams • Quality and Practice
7.5	**Ensure that carer support needs identified during assessment are clearly documented and responded to within the first 12 months of authorisation.**	1. Review and strengthen processes for documenting individual carer and household support needs identified during assessment. 2. Develop a consistent process for translating identified support needs into clear actions following authorisation, including responsibilities and appropriate timeframes. 3. Embed review points within the first 12 months of authorisation to monitor whether identified support needs have been addressed and identify any emerging needs. 4. Establish monitoring processes to ensure that identified carer support needs are being addressed within the first 12 months of authorisation.	**Start date:** January 2027 **End date:** June 2028 (ongoing)	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Carer Compliance Team • Foster Care teams • Quality and Practice

				• Newly authorised carers

Priority Area 8

Flexible and accessible respite options



What we heard from carers

Carers see respite as a part of providing quality care. They told us that the need for respite can vary depending on the child, carer and household. It might not always involve overnight stays, and they need reasonable flexibility in how respite is provided.
Carers want respite that is easy to access and proactively built into case planning so they can request it without judgement.

What we are working towards

Offering respite as a regular support for children and carers through:

- A range of flexible respite options.
- Clear policies and processes that help caseworkers and carers understand respite options.
- Including respite in case planning as a standard practice.
- Recruiting more respite carers, including exploring the carers support networks.
- Supporting respite carers with training specific to their role.

Actions we will take

- Ensure carers are informed about respite options, and other opportunities for the child to spend a few hours away from the carer or household to participate in a range of activities. Ensure carers also understand the steps and requirements for requesting and obtaining approval for respite.
- Ensure respite is discussed in case plan, carer review meetings and home visits, and considers the individual needs of the child, carer and household.
- Target respite carers as part of foster care recruitment activities.
- Ensure respite carers have access to relevant, flexibly delivered training that meets their needs and helps to develop their skills.

How will this improve carer experience?

- Carers will feel **heard and supported** by having access to flexible and proactive respite, helping to reduce carer and household stress and increase placement stability.
- Carers will know about respite and **how to request** and access both overnight care and other flexible respite options.
- Respite carers will **build confidence** in their skills and ability to provide respite care.

How will this improve experiences for children?

Children will have access to **new environments and relationships** in a safe, planned way, helping them build social skills and confidence.
Children will benefit from **greater placement stability** and quality care.

Priority Area 8: Flexible and accessible respite options				
Action	**Actions we will take**		**When will it happen**	**Who will lead this**
8.1	**Ensure carers are informed about respite options, and other opportunities for the child to spend a few hours away from the carer or household to participate in a range of activities. Ensure carers also understand the steps and requirements for requesting and obtaining approval for respite.**	1. Review and strengthen information provided to carers about available respite options and other opportunities for children and young people to participate in activities away from the carer household. 2. Develop or update clear and accessible guidance outlining how carers can request respite, including approval requirements, processes, responsibilities and expected timeframes. 3. Embed information about respite and short- break options within relevant carer induction, authorisation and ongoing support processes. 4. Seek feedback from carers about their understanding of available respite and short-break options, their experiences of accessing these supports, and barriers or opportunities for improvement.	**Start Date:** January 2027 **End Date:** December 2027	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Foster Care teams • Practice • Carer Advisory Group • Challenge Community Services carers • Marketing and Communications
8.2	**Ensure respite is discussed in case plan, carer review meetings and home visits, and considers the individual needs of the child, carer and household.**	1. Review and strengthen processes to ensure respite and other short-break needs are routinely discussed during case planning, carer reviews and home visits. 2. Ensure respite discussions consider the individual needs and circumstances of the child or young person, the carer and broader carer household. 3. Strengthen documentation of respite discussions, identified needs and agreed actions within relevant case and carer records.	**Start date:** January 2027 **End Date:** December 2027 (ongoing)	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Foster Care teams

		4. Monitor practice to provide assurance that respite needs are being discussed consistently at identified review and planning points.		• Quality and Practice • Challenge Community Services carers • children and young people
8.3	**Target respite carers as part of foster care recruitment activities.**	1. Include respite carers as an identified cohort within Challenge Community Services' targeted foster care recruitment planning and campaigns. 2. Review current respite carer availability and demand across Challenge Community Services Foster Care to identify locations or areas of greatest need and inform targeted recruitment activity. 3. Monitor respite carer recruitment and availability to assess whether recruitment activities are responding to identified needs.	**Start date:** January 2027 **End Date:** June 2028 (ongoing)	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Carer Compliance Team • Marketing and Communications • Foster Care teams • DCJ
8.4	**Ensure respite carers have access to relevant, flexibly delivered training that meets their needs and helps to develop their skills.**	1. Review existing learning and development opportunities available to respite carers to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement. 2. Consult respite carers about their learning and development needs, preferred delivery methods and barriers to accessing training. 3. Ensure respite carers have access to relevant and flexible learning opportunities that reflect their role and the needs of children and young people receiving respite care.	**Start date:** April 2027 **End Date:** June 2028 (ongoing)	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Practice • Foster Care teams

		4. Seek ongoing feedback from respite carers about the relevance, accessibility and effectiveness of training provided.		• Respite carers • Carer Advisory Group
8.5	**Review and strengthen respite arrangements to ensure they are accessible, flexible and responsive to the needs of children, carers and their households.**	1. Review existing respite and short-care arrangements to identify barriers to access, gaps in availability and opportunities to strengthen flexibility and responsiveness. 2. Explore opportunities to improve respite and short-term arrangements, including shorter breaks, activity-based options and approaches that support children's routines, relationships and essential connections. 3. Seek feedback from carers and where appropriate, children and young people about whether respite arrangements are meeting their needs and use this feedback to inform service improvements.	**Start date:** April 2027 **End Date:** June 2028	**Lead:** • Carer Action Plan Project Lead • Foster Care Leadership **Partners:** • Foster Care teams • Practice • Carer Advisory Group • respite carers • Challenge Community Services carers • children and young people, Finance

Glossary

AbSec	NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
ACWA	Association of Children's Welfare Agencies
CALD	Culturally and linguistically diverse
DCJ	Department of Communities and Justice
FACSIAR	Family and Community Services Insights Analysis and Research
HCEA	High-cost Emergency Arrangement
NGO	Non-government organisation
NSW	New South Wales
OCG	Office of the Children's Guardian
OOHC	Out-of-home care
OOHC Agency or OOHC Provider	Non-government providers funded by DCJ and accredited by the Office of the Children's Guardian to provide out-of-home care to children and young people in NSW. They may be an NGO or an ACCO. They may also be referred to in other OOHC resources as Permanency Support Program (PSP) providers.
Lead	In the context of this action plan, a *lead* refers to the individual, team, program area or organisation that holds primary responsibility for driving, coordinating and overseeing the successful completion of a specific action. The lead is accountable for ensuring progress, maintaining momentum and delivering the agreed-on outcomes within the defined timeframes. A lead is expected to: • **Coordinate planning and implementation**, ensuring that tasks are sequenced, monitored and completed. • **Engage and collaborate with partners**, drawing on their expertise, resources or participation as required. • **Ensure alignment with broader strategic goals**, policies and legislative or organisational requirements. • **Monitor progress, identify risks and escalate issues** that may impact delivery or timelines. • **Report on milestones, outcomes and impacts**, ensuring transparency and accountability. • **Facilitate communication** between stakeholders, partners and leadership to maintain clarity and shared understanding.

	The lead does not necessarily deliver every component of the action directly; however, they are responsible for ensuring that all necessary work is undertaken whether by themselves or in collaboration with partners to achieve the intended results.
Partner	In the context of this action plan, a *partner* refers to any individual, group, organisation or agency that plays a meaningful role in the development, implementation or evaluation of the actions outlined. A partner may contribute at varying levels of engagement, ranging from providing consultation and subject matter expertise, to offering strategic advice, to actively contributing to the delivery or codelivery of initiatives. Partnerships may include stakeholders who: • **Provide consultation** to inform planning, identify needs, or validate approaches. • **Offer specialised knowledge, resources or support** that strengthen the quality or impact of actions. • **Contribute to implementation**, either through shared responsibility, aligned activities, or direct participation. • **Co-delivered or jointly lead initiatives**, where responsibilities, decision-making and outcomes are shared. Partners collaborate to enhance outcomes, ensure actions are informed by diverse perspectives, and promote coordinated, effective support for carers and children in out-of-home care.
	This icon identifies an **action led by DCJ** on behalf of the sector, that will benefit all authorised carers. DCJ is responsible for coordinating, setting direction and delivering on these actions.
	This icon identifies an action that includes a **service funded by DCJ.** These services support all carers. This icon indicates to agencies areas where DCJ's action plan contains information about existing funded services and resources that agencies might consider including when developing their own actions. The icon can be left in the template or deleted.

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CHALLENGE
Community Services