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### *It's Christmas Time ...*

*The Management Committee & Staff of Fin WA want to acknowledge the difficult time that Christmas is for families who have children in 'out of home care'. We hope you can find some restful peace during this time. Our thoughts are with you.*

### **Season's Greetings to you all.**

## Welcome ...

Welcome to our third edition of "Finformation".

Our AGM was held in October and subsequently we have had a change in committee members. We say farewell to Lynn Easterling who will be concentrating on her PhD studies and Celine Harrison who is retiring after dedicating the last 30 years to the human service field; Celine has been a significant influence in promoting changes to the better inclusion of pregnant mothers in the child protection process.

Thank you Lynn and Celine for your commitment, insight and wisdom into the early work of Fin WA.

We welcome to commit-

tee Allison Leonard as our treasurer. Allison is the Executive Manager of Finances at Anglicare WA and we are grateful for her willingness to join us.

This year has been significant in terms of the numbers of families we have assisted in achieving better outcomes for them and their children. Our relationship with the department has also been enhanced with many and varied invitations to speak with different departmental teams and district conferences. All occasions provided a great opportunity for advancing the voice of parents.

Of particular significance in recent months was the in-

corporation of FIN Australia. Fin branches from across the nation have been meeting via teleconference for many years and during this year we underwent a consultation process to become a united voice. Fortunately we were able to reach common objectives in forming a united FIN which will provide a national voice for parents and families in the child protection system. Our own chair, John Berger was elected chair of the FIN A committee and Karen Crossley is WA's parent representative.

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**Workshops in 2012 to help parents learn more about DCP and legal processes**

**The Practitioners Forum has provided a valuable space where Practitioners involved in Child Protection can come together and share best practice.**

## Information Sessions for 2012

Over the past few years we have been running information and support sessions 3 times per month, in Joondalup, Perth and Rockingham.

For those who have attended they have found the sessions to be helpful and informative. However we continually have parents tell us that attending such sessions and hearing other families stories is very disheartening and difficult.

In partnership with the Women's Law Centre we have been devel-

oping workshops in place of the regular monthly sessions. These will be held 1 evening per week for 3 or 4 weeks for 2 hours each. The sessions will provide information about the court processes and DCP processes. Topics will include 'what does a time limited order mean?' 'how to respond to an affidavit', 'how to prepare for court or a care plan or a signs of safety meeting', 'what are my rights?' and 'how can I get DCP to listen to me?'

The workshops are scheduled to begin in March and we hope they will occur at least once per term.

At this stage the workshops are designed for parents and family members. If the interest from service providers is evident we may consider developing something similar at a later date.

If you would like further information regarding the workshops please contact the Fin WA office on 9227 5818.

## Practitioners Forum

The Practitioners Forum continues to be well attended by a range of non-government and government organizations working with families involved with DCP.

The session in October was very well received when we had Helen McMahon speak about 'assessment'. It raised many questions regarding how we collaborate and work in partnership when we have different understandings of what an assessment means, how it is conducted and how decisions are reached.

The issue of how we come to different assessments and how to 'bridge' the differences was raised as particularly problematic. We then followed this up in December and had small group discussions focused on 'Working in collaboration and partnership' with particular focus on assessment.

Again this was a very rich and comprehensive discussion focused on being mindful of the 'lenses' we use and how this affects our working relationship with other service providers. The importance of supervision and self care was highlighted as a necessity to manage the high levels of anxiety that can be created by difficult relationships with other workers.



- Recently there has been a lot of discussion between Fin WA and DCP regarding the issue of parents and carers getting to know each other. The significance of this is that if parents know carers and vice versa then there is a greater opportunity for a positive regard to develop which will benefit the child. This is a new way of thinking and practicing for the department and it will take some time before we see practice that encourages a

parent-carer relationship; however the dialogue has begun!

- In partnership with the Department of Communities we are developing parenting programmes especially for parents who do not have their children in their care. This is seen as really important because parents are often expected to attend parenting courses with parents not involved with DCP. It can be quite shameful for a parent to have to participate in such courses when others haven't experienced the challenges of

DCP as well as how to relate new techniques in managing behaviour when you don't have your children in your care.

- Leadership WA has again come to our assistance and offered Fin WA the services of a consultant for us to review our strategic plan and membership.

We look forward in 2012 to developing these and other projects.

## Getting to know us ...

My name is Gail Crockett and I have been a support and advocacy worker at Fin WA for the last 3 years. I have a Bachelor of Education in psychology and education. In my twenties I taught in both Primary and Secondary schools in NZ. After raising 3 children I became involved in Barnardos community work, followed by 15 years as a social worker recruiting, assessing, training and supporting Foster Parents. After 2 years working as a Pastoral Care Coordinator at a large Anglican church my husband and I moved to Australia to be with our children and grandchildren.

During my years working in the fostering field I became acutely aware of the importance of children having regular quality time with their parents and extended family. It was part of my role to ensure that Foster Parents were aware of the research which

indicated much better outcomes for children when they were able to be returned home to their families, if this was not possible then it was essential for the children to have regular contact and close links with their birth families. This was often difficult for foster parents to accept initially as they wanted to integrate their foster children into their own families. I promoted the inclusion of birth families in children's lives at every opportunity as I felt it was very important that foster parents were prepared and willing to be a part of this process.

When I arrived in Perth I was excited when I read about the new role of Fin WA support worker which was to be appointed, so I applied for the position. I was enthusiastic about advocating for families who needed support in gaining better contact or reunification with their children. The legal system and the ways child-

dren are taken into care differ greatly from what I was used to in NZ. However, I feel that my experience has assisted me a great deal in working in this field.

Sometimes the work is very challenging and demanding, but there have been some really encouraging results along the way and I am feeling optimistic about the role Fin WA workers can play in the future. I have enjoyed being part of a great team where everyone is passionate about the work we do. We are well supported and provided with training and supervision.





Dear Santa

I was hoping you could spread my list over several Christmases cause I reckon it will probably be too hard to do again.

I've been a pretty good mum this year.  
I have done everything I've been told.  
I haven't hurt anyone - even though I have really wanted to.  
I've fed, cleaned and cuddled my children when I can see them.  
I've always been there for visits and I've not complained when my children don't turn up.

Here are my Christmas wishes:

I'd really like to see my children regularly.  
I'd really like to know more about what is happening with my children.  
I'd like to know what I have to do to get my children back.  
I'd like it if it could be a complete list that cannot be added too.  
I'd like to know if my children are moved.  
I'd like to know if my children are sick.  
I'd like to know if my children get hurt.  
I'd like their school reports, and maybe even a picture they have drawn at school.  
I'd really like a photo!!

And if you are pulling out the big guns this year: I'd really like to be able to call someone who can support me to achieve these things and talk to the case-workers please.



P.S. One more thing - you can cancel all my requests over the years if this works and my children come home - I will never ask for anything again!



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The Family Inclusion Network of WA (Fin WA) will be closed between Christmas and New Year. The office will re-open on Tuesday 3rd January 2012.

***We wish you all a safe holiday time.***