

Kinship care

Practice skills development workshop

Purpose of workshop

To develop the knowledge and skills of all practitioners to enable them to:

- articulate and understand the benefits of kinship care
- articulate and understand the challenges for kinship carers
- engage in a strength-based partnership with kinship carers whilst keeping the child in focus.

Learning outcomes

Participants will be able to:

- articulate and understand the advantages of kinship care as the preferred placement option for children who require out-of-home care
- reflect on their own assumptions and values about kinship care and how these assumptions impact on practice and the way they see their own role in working with kinship carers
- identify the particular challenges that are unique to kinship care
- understand strength-based principles and practice for engaging with kinship carers that enhance stability for both the child and carer.

Values



- Values are the things you believe are important
- We all have values, whether we recognise them or not
- Values affect how you practice
- Critical that you understand your own values
- Your values will determine what you assume about families
- Workplace stress comes from our values not being in alignment with our practice.

Assumptions

- “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree”
- Kinship care is less safe for children than foster care
- Kinship carers need less support as they’re family and can cope
- The outcomes for children are poorer in kinship settings

Assumptions about kinship care placements

Small group discussion:

Q: What do you think are some of the myths and assumptions associated with kinship care?

Think about the question from the perspective of yourself as a worker, other workers, a kinship carer, and the community

“Sometimes carers get a lot of blockages being kin so as not to get the kids, my carer had the association with my mum, so she was treated bad.”

Create Foundation (2011)

“My Nan didn’t feel like the Department was involved, we hardly saw any of our workers, they didn’t treat her with respect, they treated her like a normal foster carer where in reality she was everything to us, she was our family and loved us... she would have preferred less involvement I think. When the Department listens to you, they discriminate against kinship carers, they are a lot more harder on them than regular foster carers.”

Create Foundation (2011)

Context of kinship care

- Purpose and aims
- Legislative context and requirements
- Policy and program context
- Kinship carer characteristics
- Kinship carer statistics



Purpose and aims of kinship care

- to provide children who require OOHC with a safe and caring home environment with someone who is of significance to the child and who can meet the child's daily care and protection needs
- to promote continuity for the child
- to maintain family connections by retaining the child's links with their birth family, community and culture
- family preservation

Legislative context of kinship care

- *Child Protection Act 1999*, section 5B(b) acknowledges that families have the primary responsibility for the upbringing, protection and development of their children.
- The Act requires the department to give consideration to placing the child, as a first option, with kin (section 5B(h)).
- Definition of kin - “any of the child’s relatives who are persons of significance to the child, and anyone else who is a person of significance to the child” (Schedule 3).

Legislative context cont.

The Act also acknowledges that children should be:

- provided with stable living arrangements that provide for a stable connection with family and community (section 5B(k))
- able to maintain relationships with parents and kin (section 5B(l))
- able to know, explore and maintain their identity and values, including their cultural, ethnic and religious identity (section 5B(m)).

Legislative context cont.

Section 83 – Child Placement Principle – preferred placement options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children – prioritises placement with a member of the child’s family then member of the child’s community or language group.



The kinship care program description

A resource with links in chapters 5 and 8 of the Child Safety Practice Manual

On the department's internet site:

<http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/childsafety/foster-care/about-foster-and-kinship-care/what-is-kinship-care>



National standards for OOHC

- The goal of the kinship care program is to ensure that children in out-of-home care are provided with quality care that is consistent with the *National standards for out-of-home care*.
- The national standards for OOHC is one of the key priority projects as part of the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*.

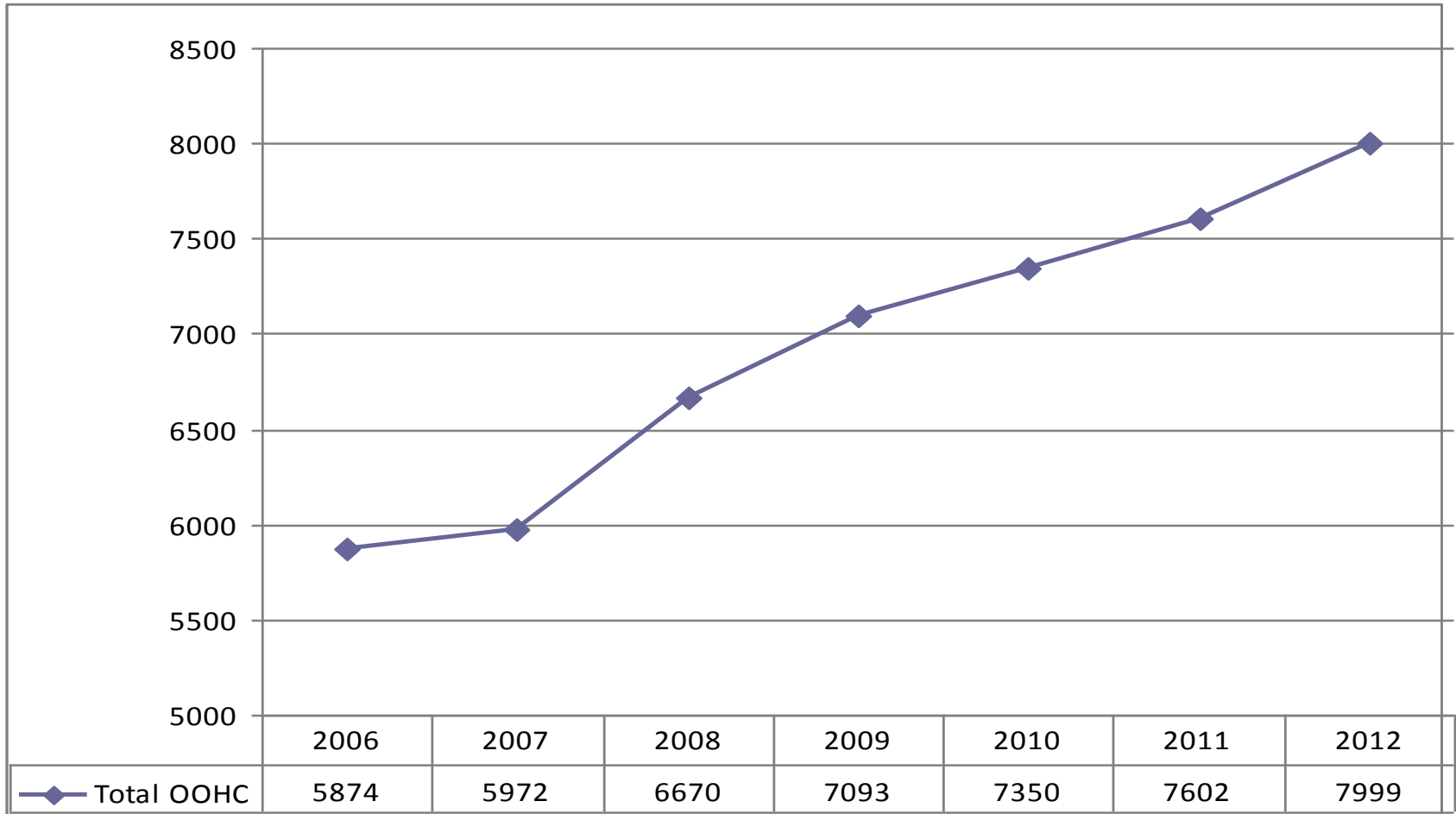
Characteristics of kinship carers

Kinship carers are more likely to be:

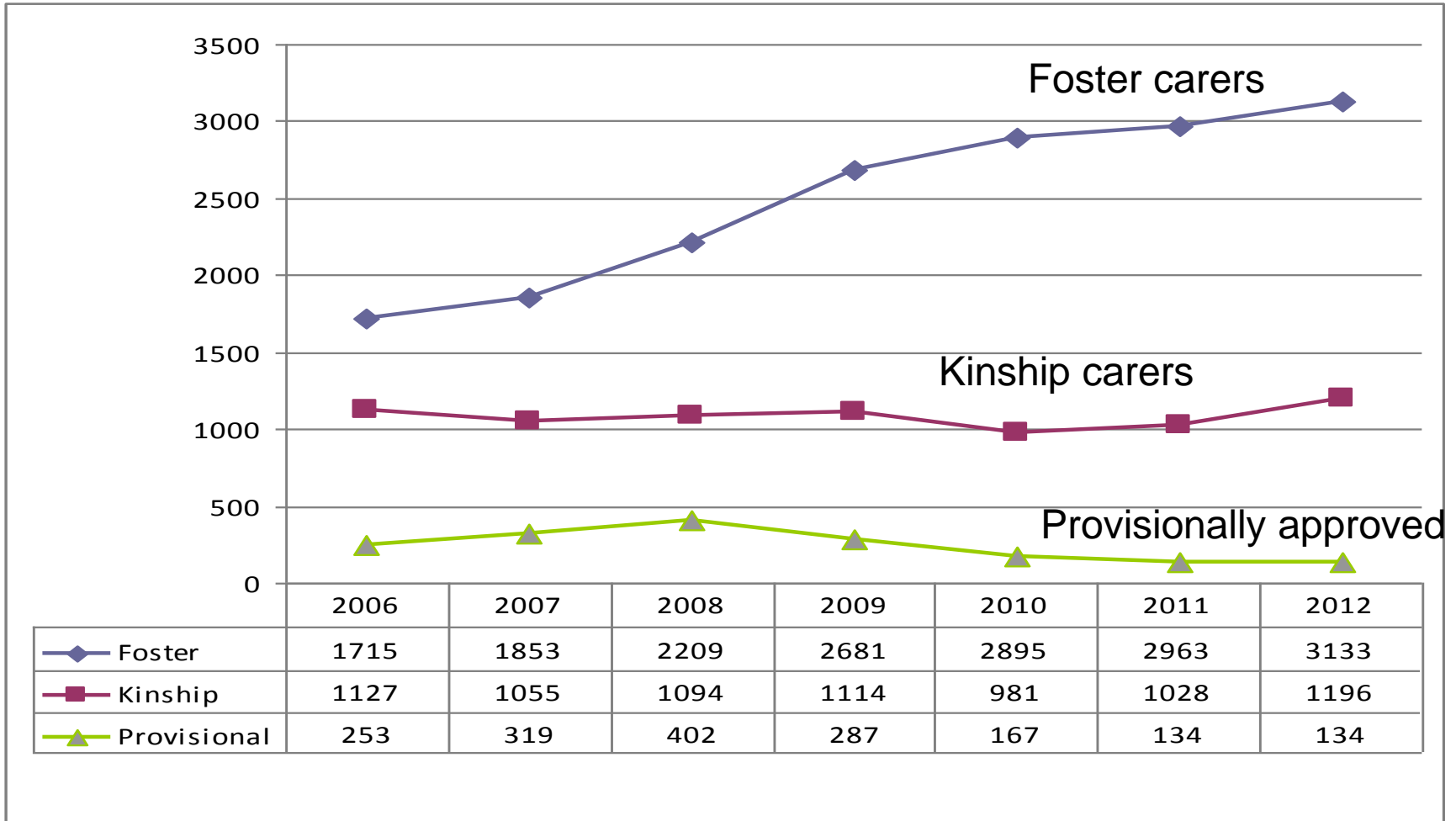
- single older women
- have reduced income
- have had limited educational opportunities
- have lower socio-economic status than foster carers



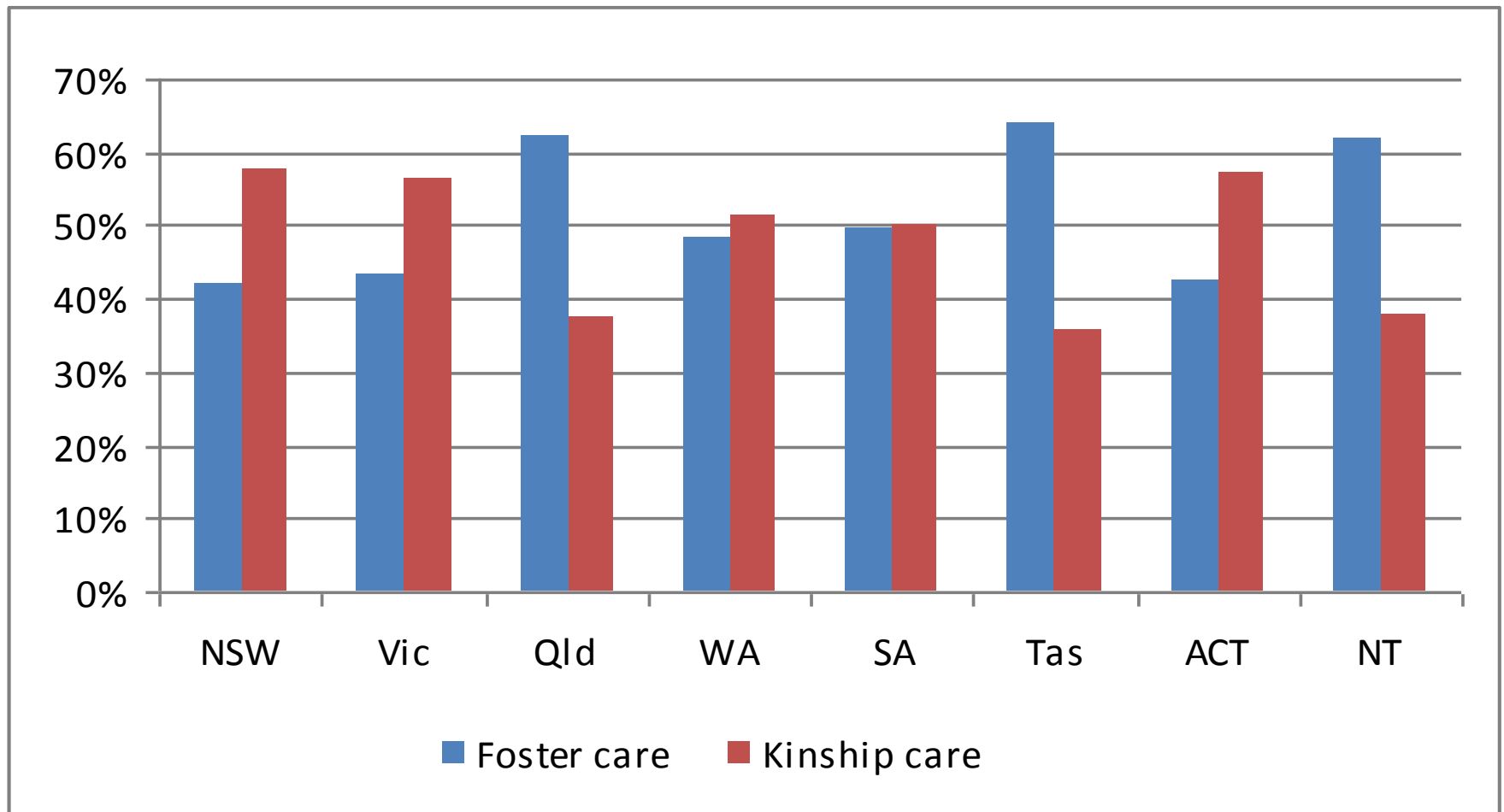
Growth of children in OOHC



Number of carers by approval type



Children in care by placement type



Benefits of kinship care

“ If the goal of kinship care is to enhance the behavioural development, mental health functioning and placement stability of children, then the evidence base is supportive”

Conclusion from a systematic review undertaken by the Campbell Collaboration (Winokur, Holton & Valentine, 2009, p.37)

Benefits of kinship care

- increased stability and continuity
- enhanced opportunity to develop their identity
- feelings of belonging and connectedness
- better opportunities for family contact and ties



Benefits of kinship care

- increased chance of siblings remaining together, resulting in reduced anxiety about separation
- a buffering against the effects of family separation
- longer placements and fewer placement changes



Children's views on kinship care

Children in kinship placements may:

- feel a sense of belonging and not wish to reunify with their parents
- feel hopeful that they will eventually live with their parents
- consider that living with kin is preferable to being in foster care
- not feel stigmatised



Children's views on kinship care

- are fond of their carers and siblings
- some children may feel different to their peers
- some children do don't feel different to their peers, rather view their arrangements as just a different family form within a diverse society.
- perceive their kinship carers as supportive and understanding
- feel valued and like being cared for by someone who loves them and offers permanency



Children's views on kinship care

- appreciate being out of a difficult situation and value the stability of their current arrangement
- optimistic about their future
- feel more secure when kinship carers have legal rights



“You actually feel like you’re at home and you don’t have to walk into a strange house and meet completely new people and develop new relationships – that’s why it’s hard to keep moving around. When it’s Christmas, you’re actually with your family.”

“You get to see more of your extended family – you can be more open with your family, you can tell them anything.”



Create Foundation (2011)

“...you feel more comfortable, you don't feel like an outcast. I didn't fit in at school because I didn't live with my mum and dad, you felt like you didn't belong because you didn't have that typical mum and dad, but you're with family so it heals it a bit, I got the next best thing by being with family”.

Create Foundation (2011)



Challenges of kinship care

- poorer or different standard of care expected by workers compared to non-kin placements
- kinship carers may not be sufficiently supported by workers
- safety issues – parents may gain unsafe contact to their children
- intense parental emotions can result in difficulties for the kinship carer (e.g., hostility, undermining)





Challenges of kinship care

- developmental impacts on the child due to capacity of kinship carers (e.g., meeting child's needs, insufficient stimulation)
- difficulties for kinship carers to manage new responsibilities and boundaries with the family
- kinship carers may persevere with difficulties longer than foster carers given their feelings of responsibility



“You put everything on hold ... you are a bit isolated, your friendships aren't the same. There's never any spare money for going out and our friends have stopped asking us”

“I'm scared about the future ... I don't have death to look forward to ... I feel that my youth has been stolen, I feel cheated”

O'Neill, C. (2011). Support in Kith and Kin Care - the Experience of Carers. *Children Australia*, 36(2).

It's not all negative, as is evident in these grandmothers' comments:

If you just relax into it and not feel cross, there's something about the continuity of generations and life that seems sort of right ... the experience has been enormously enriching ... the relationship [with granddaughter] is a very beautiful thing.

It's a struggle, but I must say I wouldn't have it any other way...they're an absolute joy... it's a scream actually...between the worms and the nits and everything else.



O'Neill, C. (2011). Support in Kith and Kin Care - the Experience of Carers. *Children Australia*, 36(2).

Other relative carers (aunts/uncles, older siblings etc) express a strong sense of family solidarity with the young people in their care:

“There’s no reason for her to go into foster care when she’s got family [to care for her] ... that’s family, that’s what you do.”

They also talked about the confusion inherent in their roles:

“The whole family dynamics, it’s a constant juggling of everybody ... you’re an auntie, a mother, a carer.”

An older sibling carer:

“I’ve had to act as a mum and be a sister at the same time ... and still discipline her or pull her back a bit where she needs to ... that’s very hard.”

O’Neill, C. (2011). Support in Kith and Kin Care - the Experience of Carers. *Children Australia*, 36(2).

How can we best work with kinship carers?



What kinship carers tell us

Kinship carers have reported wanting to be valued, respected, trusted and treated as experts (Murphy, 2008).



“I’d like someone to say ‘he’s doing well, you’re doing a great job’ – all they do is criticise if something goes wrong – nobody’s here to say ‘Look do you need help?’”

(O’Neill, 2011)



“They notified us that they were going to put a Protection Order on the children...I didn’t know what that was...it sounded awful, it sounded like they were going to take the kids...”



What kinship carers tell us

- overwhelmingly carers want to be listened to
- want respite, preferably with extended family - particularly respite during school holidays which can be a difficult time
- contact with workers who have some life experience
- case worker stability
- peer support – want to meet carers in the same situation
- want to understand how the system/department works; expectations; what decisions they can make

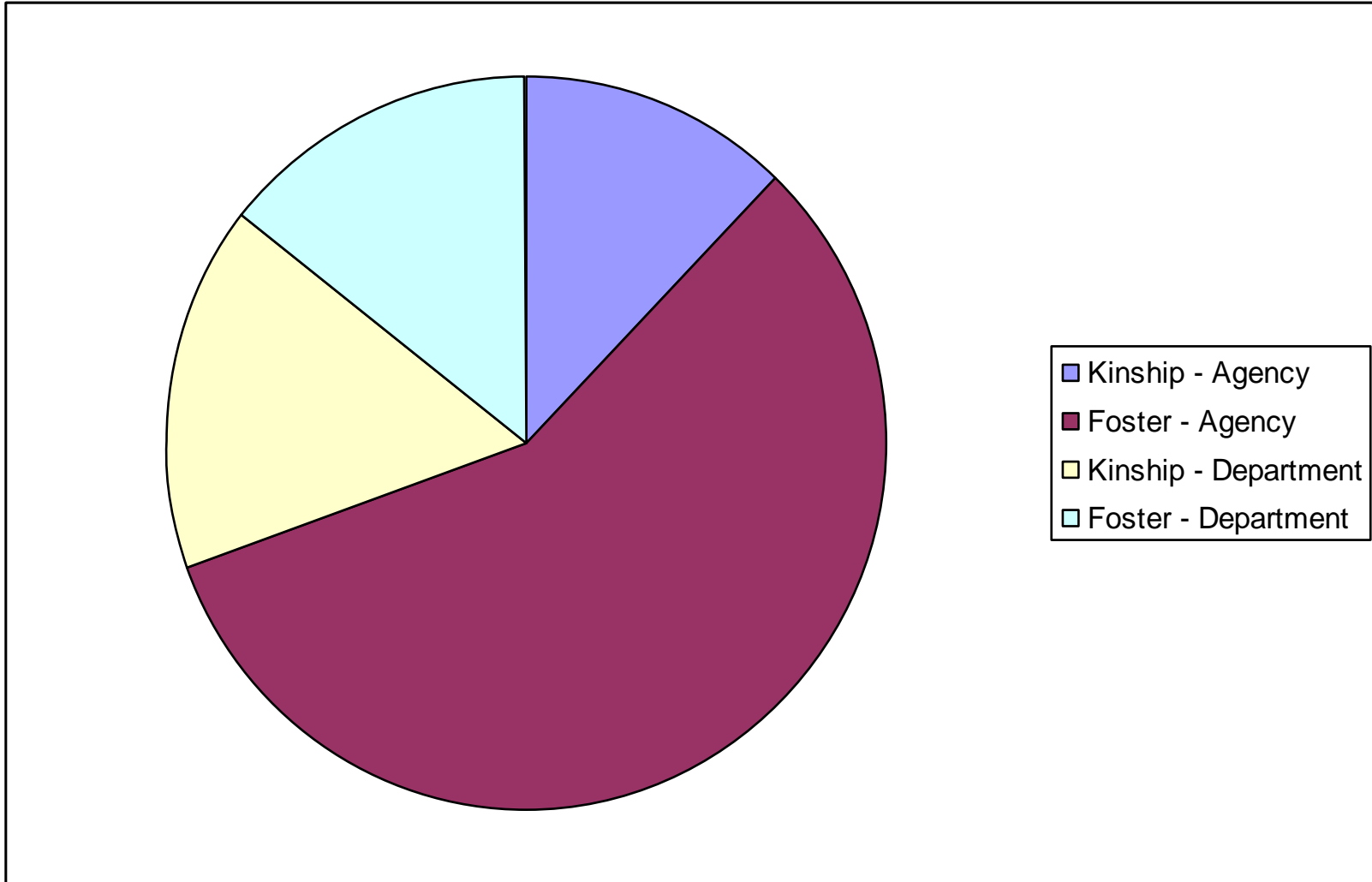
What kinship carers tell us (cont.)

- feel they have to beg for support
- generally want CSOs to know what's going on in the household and know the child, so the CSO can better understand the carer
- want their CSOs to know they're dealing with trauma and the impacts of loss of family/friends
- timely payment and reimbursement

What kinship carers tell us (cont.)

- want as much information as possible
- acknowledge the hard job that CSOs do with high case loads
- most importantly carers said they wanted workers to listen to them and the child.
- report the numerous benefits and positive aspects of being linked to a FKC service for support.

Carer type by affiliation



Carer type by affiliation as at 31 December 2012

Kinship care could be recognised as a specialist area of practice

It has been recommended by several commentators that this form of care requires well-developed policy, frameworks and resourcing.

Yardley et al, 2009; Backhouse & Graham, 2009; Warren-Adamson, 2009; Hunt, 2005 in Sinclair, 2005; Boetto, 2010.

If we wish to support kinship care:

Argent (2009) argues there are a number of issues for consideration:

- organisation supports and encourages exploration of kinship care as a placement option
- specialist teams or a dedicated, specialist kinship care practitioner within a service
- family group meetings are an integral part of kinship work - not one-off events
- specialised assessment process and courses that aim to effectively prepare kinship carers

If we wish to support kinship care (cont.):

- appropriate financial and other forms of support available (formal or informal)
- accessible support processes and packages for kinship carers, culturally-sensitive and respectful, incorporating kinship care traditions
- information resources available for kinship carers in their local communities in various languages
- local practitioners aware of provisions, support available
- kinship carers are fully briefed and prepared for kinship care: i.e., options available, potential issues, benefits, risks.

What research tells us about supporting carers:

- Support is particularly needed in the early stages of placement
- Professional supervision approach (i.e. partnership, sharing ideas, assistance, and empowerment to make the decisions)
- Where carers are older (e.g., over 60) – alternative contingency plans such as respite care or care by other family members should be planned

Supporting kinship carers (cont.)

- Not all kinship carers will require or want formalised support
- Support with managing, negotiating and supervising family contact
- Easily available information on available financial supports
- Increasing workers' understanding of the complex nature of kinship care
- Assist the carer to identify their social support network

Family inclusive practice: principles for engaging and strengthening the kinship care system

Identify family strengths:

- Every family has its own strengths and helping traditions
- Some families are more connected to their cultural traditions and find greater strength in these than other families
- Identify the strength and helping traditions that are unique to the carer who you are working with.

Bonecutter (2006)

Engaging and strengthening the kinship care system

Respect for parents, kinship carers, other relatives and children:

- professional attitude through actions, look for strengths

Collaboration

- we can't achieve goals of safety, permanency and wellbeing for children independently
- need the involvement of members of the child's kinship network to facilitate achievement of the goals

Bonecutter (2006)

Engaging and strengthening the kinship care system

Honesty and clarity about choice and consequences

- about policies and decisions; highlighting choices and explaining consequences of choices

Contracting and negotiating

- Negotiate with, rather than dictate to the kinship carer, when planning for the child
- Plans should be directed towards goals with which parties are in agreement, given kinship carers by the nature of their role will be carry out tasks that lead towards the goals for the child

Thank you