

VOLUNTARY OUT-OF-HOME CARE (VOOHC)

POLICY

Under Voluntary Out-Of-Home Care (VOOHC) legislation (2010), Riverlink is obliged to report the details of any overnight care that we provide, away from the family home.

As an arranger of VOOHC, Riverlink is required to use the Children's Guardian on-line VOOHC Register so as to have secure access to register VOOHC clients. As a registered VOOHC agency, Riverlink is required to enter information regarding placements for all children and young people under 18 years participating in VOOHC.

DEFINITIONS

Case management The process of assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring and review – case management is more intensive than supervision of VOOHC and requires regular interaction with children and young people in VOOHC, their parent(s)/families and other service providers.

Case plan A holistic written plan that builds on the existing service plan and addresses:

- the child or young person's aspirations and ongoing physical, health, emotional and behavioural, family, social, recreational and leisure, educational and/or vocational, spiritual/religious and cultural needs;
- the aspirations and needs of the child or young person's parent(s) and, where relevant, other family members; and
- any risks associated with the child or young person's care.

Case plan coordinator The person identified by the lead planning agency as responsible for coordinating the preparation and review of a child or young person's case plan (the case manager where the child or young person has a case manager).

Designated Agency An agency that may provide statutory and supported out-of-home care by virtue of it being accredited by the Children's Guardian or its participation in the Children's Guardian's Quality Improvement Program – may also provide or arrange VOOHC.

Disability An impairment of physical, cognitive, mental, sensory, emotional or developmental condition that results in a person being within the target group under Section 5 of the Disability Services Act 1993.

DoHA Department of Health and Ageing, Australian Government

FaHCSIA Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Australian Government

Lead planning agency The agency with lead responsibility for preparing and reviewing case plans – if there is a case manager, the agency with case management – if there is no case manager, the principal care agency or another agency that has agreed, with the principal care agency's consent, to prepare or review a case plan.

Management Plan The plan to address particular care needs of, or risks associated with, the child or young person (e.g. Health Plan, Nutrition Plan, Behaviour Management Plan, Risk Management Plan, Epilepsy Plan, Asthma Plan, or Allergy Plan).

Out-of-home care The care and control of a child or young person at a place other than their usual home by a person other than their parent (subject to the exceptions at section 2.1 of these Procedures).

Parent A person with parental responsibility for the child or young person (not necessarily the biological parent).

Prescribed body An organisation or body that is subject to the interagency coordination and information exchange provisions of Chapter 16A of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 - all VOOHC agencies are prescribed bodies.

Principal care agency The agency that currently provides most of a child or young person's VOOHC. The Children's Guardian can advise which VOOHC agency is the principal care agency for a particular child or young person.

Registration Is registration under clause 40G for the purposes of Part 3A of Chapter 8 of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998

Regulation The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Regulation 2000.

Relative A parent, step-parent, grandparent, brother, sister, step-brother, step-sister, uncle, aunt, niece or nephew - whether related by blood, marriage or adoption.

Registered agency An organisation registered by the Children's Guardian to provide and/or arrange VOOHC.

Relevant agency A designated agency and the same meaning as it has in section 156 of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998.

Service planning The planning by a VOOHC agency to address the child or young person's immediate and/or ongoing day to day care needs in a VOOHC placement with the agency.

Statutory out-of-home care Court-ordered out-of-home care (a child in statutory out-of-home care cannot be in VOOHC).

Supervising agency A designated agency, or the Children's Guardian, where responsible for supervising a child or young person's VOOHC.

Supported out-of-home care The care provided, arranged or otherwise supported by Community Services after Community Services has formed the opinion that the child or young person is in need of care and protection (a child in supported out-of-home care cannot be in VOOHC).

VOOHC Voluntary out-of-home care for children and young people.

VOOHC agency An organisation that provides or arranges VOOHC, in accordance with an arrangement between itself and the parent(s) of a child or young person – a VOOHC agency must be either a designated or registered agency.

VOOHC Coordinator The person nominated by the VOOHC agency as its principal point of contact for persons wishing to enquire about the agency's VOOHC placements.

VOOHC Register The Voluntary Out-of-Home Care Register, administered by the Children's Guardian, which contains details about a child or young person's VOOHC placements and case plans/reviews.

Working day A day other than a Saturday, Sunday or public holiday

Young person A person who is 16 or 17 years of age

Voluntary out-of-home care (VOOHC) refers to those situations where a parent of a child or young person makes a voluntary arrangement with an organisation for the placement of their child or young person in out-of-home care.

A child or young person (person under the age of 18) is in VOOHC, subject to the exceptions outlined below, when:

- he or she stays at a place other than his/her usual home for one or more nights;
- he or she is in the care and control of a person other than his/her parent (i.e.: the person with parental responsibility for the child or young person); and
- his/her **parent** has entered into an arrangement with an **organisation** to provide or arrange that care (a voluntary arrangement).

Voluntary out-of-home care does not include:

- care where the parent enters into an arrangement with an individual to provide care (e.g.: a parent arranging for a friend to care for their child whilst they are overseas);
- care where the child or young person arranges their own placement (e.g.: where a child self-admits to a youth refuge);
- care provided in accordance with a court order (statutory care);
- care provided, arranged or otherwise supported by Community Services after Community Services has formed the opinion that the child or young person is in need of care and protection₁ (supported care);

- care where a child or young person resides outside New South Wales (this may be relevant where care is arranged in some border areas);
- boarding services provided by a school, training establishment, university or affiliated body to enable children and young people to attend a school, training establishment or university; a holiday camp, outdoor recreation centre or similar facility where children and young people undertake or receive education, training or instruction in academic, religious, athletic or recreational pursuits unless its primary purpose is to provide respite or address the challenging behaviour of the child or young person;
- care provided by the public health system or in a licensed private hospital;
- care provided by a licensed provider of children's services (e.g.: a crèche for children of shift workers);
- care arranged by an organisation, where the care is provided by a relative of the child or young person;
- SAAP arrangements funded under the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994*; or
- Adoption services under the *Adoption Act 2000*.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The people who need to know about this policy and procedure are:

- Board of Management
- EO
- Operations Manager
- Service Coordinators

- Administration staff
- Participants and their families

PROCEDURES

As an organisation registered by the Children's Guardian to provide or arrange VOOHC, Riverlink will:

- implement procedures in the areas of intake, assessment, monitoring and interagency coordination (see 2.07 Intake Assessment and Review policy);
- obtain the signature of a parent or participant representative of a Riverlink Service Agreement before a child or young person is placed in voluntary out-of-home care. These agreements authorise the service to provide for the child or young person's care, and ensure parents/participant representatives are aware of their rights and responsibilities;
- Confirm a VOOHC placement in writing to the carers within 7 days of the placement being arranged;
- develop and implement systems to ensure information is entered into the VOOHC Register within timeframe;
- monitor the length of time children and young people receive VOOHC care, thus ensuring children and young people in VOOHC for more than 90 days in any 12 month period benefit from care that is supervised by a designated agency;

- access details of a child or young person's previous VOOHC history and any previously prepared case plans, to improve the provision of appropriate and consistent care;
- facilitate sharing of information and coordination between organisations and individuals involved in supporting the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people in VOOHC;
- implement the high-level VOOHC Code of Conduct for agencies;
- provide relevant service planners with information about care patterns, to support planning and delivery of VOOHC and support services for children and young people and their families;
- understand and fulfil the responsibility of reporting children and young people at risk of significant harm specific to VOOHC.

VOOHC Intake and Assessment

Riverlink will provide the following information to the Children's Guardian when **registering** a child on the VOOHC register:

- 1) the full name of the child or young person;
- 2) any other name by which the child or young person has previously been known;
- 3) the gender of the child or young person;
- 4) the date of birth of the child or young person;
- 5) the place of birth of the child or young person;
- 6) whether in the opinion of Riverlink, the child or young person is in the target group within the meaning of the Disability Services Act 1993;
- 7) the date on which the child or young person was placed in voluntary out-of-home care provided by Riverlink; and
- 8) the date on which the child or young person ceased to be in voluntary out-of-home care provided by Riverlink.

The above information will be provided in a manner and format approved by the Children's Guardian **within 5 working days** of the child or young person being placed in voluntary out-of-home care provided by Riverlink.

Additional information regarding the specific needs of children, young people and their families is obtained to determine whether the Riverlink can provide appropriate services to meet the immediate and ongoing needs of the child or young person.

As part of the Riverlink intake process all carers complete a Participant Assessment Form. Riverlink's Client Management System (CIMS) develops a Riverlink Risk Profile for each participant based on the information from the Participant Assessment Form.

To avoid duplication, the entry of data regarding participant's details and placements needs to be accurate. One administration staff member will be allocated the task of weekly updating the VOOHC register. An additional staff member will also be trained in the process to cater for staff leave. When changes in staff occur a handover process occurs, during which staff are made aware and trained in VOOHC requirements and processes.

As a VOOHC registered agency, Riverlink will

- 1) Notify the Children's Guardian when a child or young person is in unsupervised voluntary out-of-home care as soon as is practicable, if:
 - a) the child or young person has been in voluntary out-of-home care (whether provided by the agency or any other organisation) for more than 90 days in any period of 12 months, and
 - b) the voluntary out-of-home care is not supervised by a designated agency or the Children's Guardian;
- 2) ascertain whether a child or young person has been in voluntary out-of-home care for more than a total of 90 days in any period of 12 months;
- 3) provide the information above in a format approved by the Children's Guardian;
- 4) access the Quarterly Activity Report to self-monitor the effectiveness of the VOOHC Register entry processes.

Riverlink will undertake the following procedures in the management of the behaviour of children or young people in voluntary out-of-home care:

- 1) A support worker, authorised by Riverlink to provide the voluntary out-of-home care, in managing the behaviour of a child or young person:
 - a) must not use physical coercion or physical punishment, and
 - b) must, in any event, use only behaviour management practices approved by Riverlink.
- 2) A support worker who finds that the approved behaviour management practices are not sufficiently effective to manage the behaviour of a child or young person is to notify that fact as soon as practicable to Riverlink or the Children's Guardian (as appropriate).
- 3) On receiving a notification under subclause 2), above, Riverlink or the Children's Guardian, after assessing the situation and consulting the parent of the child or young person, is to determine if the problem should be addressed:
 - (a) by providing appropriate advice, support and training to the voluntary carer and appropriate support to the child or young person, or
 - (b) by changing the placement arrangements.
- (4) Riverlink will ensure that each support worker, authorised by it to provide voluntary out-of-home care, complies with the above clause.

Riverlink will provide age-appropriate placement matching and services:

- 1) A child or young person will not to be placed in VOOHC if appropriate services can be provided to enable them to remain with their families - family supports, non-VOOHC respite arrangements to be considered in addition to VOOHC, or combination
- 2) Age appropriate care children under 7 years old should not be placed in centre based care unless they have complex health care needs;
- 3) Young people aged 16-17 years old can be placed with adults if risk assessment completed;
- 4) Children under 16 years old must only be placed with adults in exceptional circumstances i.e. high health needs
- 5) Activities for participants will be arranged so that children and young people will not mix with adult participants.

Supervision of VOOHC of more than a total of 90 days in a 12 month period

A child or young person **must not** remain in VOOHC for more than a total of 90 days in any 12 month period unless that care is provided or supervised by a designated agency, or is supervised by the Children's Guardian.

A designated agency or the Children's Guardian is known as a supervising agency where it supervises a child or young person's VOOHC. The supervising agency is responsible for supervising the VOOHC provided to the child or young person by all VOOHC agencies until supervision ends.

If a designated agency already has case management of a child or young person, it is automatically the supervising agency for that child or young person.

Registered VOOHC provider must notify the Children's Guardian where the supervision requirement is not met

If Riverlink provides VOOHC to a child or young person who has been in VOOHC for more than a total of 90 days in a 12 month period and that care is not supervised by a supervising agency, then the Riverlink must notify the Children's Guardian. Riverlink will:

- complete the *VOOHC Supervision Alert* form which is available at www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/voluntary-out-of-home-care;
- email the completed form to voohc@kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au as soon as is practicable after the supervision requirement is breached.

Secure storage of personal information

Personal information about children and young people and their parents will be held in a secure manner (in paper form and/or electronically) and accessible only to those members of staff who need access to that information in order to do their jobs. Access to the VOOHC Register is linked to staff Roles including Data entry and VOOHC coordinator.

Related Forms:

Intake Form
Participant Assessment Form
Child Safe Code of Conduct

Related Policies:

1.19 Records Management
2.14 Privacy, Dignity and Confidentiality
2.29 Behaviour Support

Relevant Standards:

Restrictive Practice Authorisation (RPH) Mechanism – Operational Guide

Related documents with reference to:

VOOHC Brochure

Legislation:

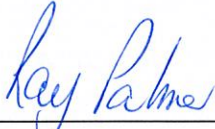
Disability Services Act 1993, Section 5

The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 ("the Act");
Sections 135, 135C and 156-156A, Chapter 16A, Chapter 8 Part 3, Clause 40G

The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Regulation 2012 Clauses
40C-40V and Schedules 4 and 5

The Children, Youth and Families Act 2005; Part 3.5

Voluntary out-of-home care (VOOHC) Legislation (2010)



Ray Palmer
Executive Officer

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