

KEEP THEM SAFE

A shared approach to child wellbeing

CHILD WELLBEING UNITS: AGENCIES WITHOUT A CWU

Keep Them Safe: A shared approach to child wellbeing is the NSW Government's response to the Report of the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. Keep Them Safe recognises the importance of the wellbeing of all children and young people, with the aim of providing appropriate support to families earlier, to prevent children and young people from requiring statutory child protection intervention. To achieve this, Keep Them Safe encourages families, communities, government agencies, and non-government organisations to work together to support children, young people, and families.

Summary of changes

To ensure that vulnerable families are identified earlier and receive appropriate services in a timely manner, the NSW Government has established referral pathways to identify and provide services to children and young people who fall below the risk of significant harm statutory threshold.

These pathways include Family Referral Services (see *Keep Them Safe Factsheet No. 6: Family Referral Services*) and Child Wellbeing Units (see *Keep Them Safe Factsheet No. 4a: Child Wellbeing Units*).

What is a Child Wellbeing Unit (CWU)?

CWUs operate in the government agencies that account for the majority of reports to the Child Protection Helpline: The NSW Police Force, Department of Education and Communities, NSW Health (including Local Health Districts, Affiliated Health Services, and certain general practitioners), and the Department of Family and Community Services Ageing, Disability, and Home Care; and Housing).

Functions of the CWU

CWUs:

- help agency mandatory reporters identify the level of risk to a child or young person, including whether matters require a report to the Child Protection Helpline
- provide advice to agency mandatory reporters about possible service responses by the

agency or other services to assist children, young people, and families, and in some cases initiate direct referrals

- drive better alignment and coordination of agency service systems, to enable better responses to vulnerable children, young people, and families.

CWUs can also provide advice about information exchange where there are safety, welfare or wellbeing concerns about children or young people.

What does this mean for reporters without a Child Wellbeing Unit?

All organisations, both government and non-government, need to consider how they can support vulnerable children and young people.

Mandatory reporters who do not have a CWU in their agency use the Mandatory Reporter Guide (refer to



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KTS Factsheet No. 3a: Mandatory Reporter Guide) to assess whether their concerns for a child or young person meet the threshold of suspected risk of significant harm. When the Mandatory Reporter Guide indicates the concerns may reach the suspected risk of significant harm threshold, these mandatory reporters are prompted to report their concerns directly to the Child Protection Helpline.

When the Mandatory Reporter Guide indicates that a reporter should “Consult with a Professional”, reporters should consider what more they could do to address child wellbeing concerns. This may mean:

- talking with supervisors about referral options or other helpful strategies
- talking to other practitioners who know family members, in particular children and young people, to ensure accurate information about the family is obtained, and to explore whether there are other strategies that could support the child or young person
- talking to a practitioner with specialist knowledge about concerns relevant to the family.

Reporters may also wish to:

- use their own local contacts to make appropriate referrals (including the Domestic Violence Line, Early Intervention Services, or other government and non-government services)
- use Family Referral Services, where these have been established, to find an appropriate service
- use the Human Services Network

database ServiceLink to find details of local community services: www.hsnet.nsw.gov.au

- contact the KTS Support Line for information and advice (1800 772 479, 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays).

What information will Community Services give?

The Child Protection Helpline will provide feedback by letter or fax in response to reports made by mandatory reporters. The feedback will detail:

- whether a report about a child or young person meets the statutory threshold
- any action or ongoing involvement Community Services may have with the child and their family.

In cases where it has been determined that the concerns fall below the risk of significant harm threshold, the feedback prompts mandatory reporters to consider what additional services or supports could be provided locally.

Community Services is also able to provide information under Chapter 16A of the *Children and Young Persons Care and Protection Act 1998* to mandatory reporters (considered prescribed bodies) in relation to the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a child or young person, or class of children or young people if it is reasonably believed that providing the information would assist with:

- making any decisions, assessments or plans or initiating or conducting any investigations, or providing a service (relating to the safety,

welfare or wellbeing of the child or young person or class of children or young people), or

- managing any risk to the child or young person or class of children or young people that might arise in the recipient’s capacity as an employer or designated agency.

How will a cumulative picture of risk be built?

Prescribed bodies are able to exchange information under Chapter 16A of the *Children and Young Persons Care & Protection Act 1998*, where that information is relevant to the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a child or young person. Sharing information under these circumstances is not limited to cases where concerns for a child or young person meet the threshold of risk of significant harm. (For more information, see *KTS Factsheet No. 7: Information Exchange*, and the *Child Wellbeing & Child Protection NSW Interagency Guidelines*, available on the Keep Them Safe website).

CWUs use a common database known as WellNet that shows details about a child and their family when CWUs are contacted by their agencies about them. They also have limited access to the Community Services KiDS system, to identify children and young people currently being case managed by Community Services or a Brighter Futures Lead Agency. CWUs are able to exchange information with other organisations where that information exchange is covered by Chapter 16A.