

## Response to Proposal 10-7 and Question 10-3

### ***Children's Contact Services***

This submission is co-authored by Ms Susan De Campo, Director of LifeCare Consultancy and Ms Amelia De Campo, Manager of LifeCare's Children's Supervised Contact Service.

LifeCare Consultancy is a Pty Ltd company that operates from Stones Corner, Queensland, Australia. Now, the largest privately operated contact service in Queensland, LifeCare's Children's Contact Service commenced operation in 2007 under the direction of accredited Regulation 7 Family Consultant, Susan De Campo. Susan is also a Registered Counsellor, accredited counselling supervisor, academic and Registered Nurse. Amelia De Campo has been managing this service since 2013. LifeCare Consultancy also offers a range of ancillary support services such as:

- Counselling: Individual, couple, child and adolescent and family therapy.
- Circle of Security: This attachment-based parenting program is facilitated by certified trainer, Mr Chris Chicoteau.
- Post-Separation Parenting Program: Specifically designed to assist in managing post-separation conflict, improving communication and assisting parents to focus on the needs of child. This program is facilitated by highly experienced and qualified practitioners.
- Anger Management Program: Facilitated by Psychologist Ian Polglase, this program can be individually tailored to focus on the specific challenges facing a client.

LifeCare is committed to upholding the key standards and guidelines applicable to this industry, attending professional development, networking events and evidence-based training (in the area of child protection, family law and child development).

All of the supervisors at LifeCare's Children's Supervised Contact Service hold relevant tertiary qualifications, current affiliation with their relevant professional accreditation authorities, current Blue Card authorisation and first aid certificates.

As a private contact service, LifeCare believes in the importance of maintaining and adhering to the same standards of practice as upheld by the Children's Contact Service Guiding Principles for Good Practice.

The manager of the Children's Contact Service, Ms Amelia De Campo is a qualified social worker. In 2015, Ms Amelia De Campo was also the first person from a private service provider to be appointed to the board of peak body ACCSA (Australian Children's Contact Services Association). She subsequently assisted with formulating a response regarding the accreditation of private and government funded contact services.

We wish to draw your attention to key concerns regarding the privately operated supervised contact services:

1. We are aware of possible agenda bias with certain services. That is, rather than providing a neutral, impartial service, services are being provided by persons who ostensibly have their own issues with the family law system. They may, for example, have been found to be perpetrators of family violence.
2. There are private contact centres operating with workers whom have little or no experience in the family law, social services, child protection, family violence or child development. Workers also do not hold relevant academic qualifications.

Ms Amelia De Campo strongly urges that two key areas outlined in the ALRC Response, receive urgent review:

**Proposal 10-7**

There should be a requirement for all workers to hold a valid Working with Children Check as a minimum standard of practice.

Working with vulnerable, disadvantaged, “at-risk” families requires that the worker upholds certain skills, values and practice experience.

We believe that all workers should also have “police checks” as some workers might “slip through the cracks”. The “history” of the worker supporting these families must be investigated. It is not appropriate for workers who have a personal history of (perpetrating) domestic/family violence, or being involved with particular men’s rights activist groups, or having supervised visits themselves (as a result of their personal involvement in family law), provide supervised contact services.

**Question 10-3**

Our response to this question is that a Certificate IV in Community Services or a Diploma of Community Services is simply insufficient.

All people who work in private and government funded children’s contact services should hold a minimum qualification of a ‘relevant’ three year university degree (education, counselling, psychology, social work) in addition to further training, such as that which was offered in the Diploma in Children’s Contact Services. This training ought to be offered as a post-graduate diploma and should be compulsory for all workers. We would support a “grandfather clause” for current practitioners with considerable experience to be exempt from such a requirement.

The reason we believe a Certificate or Diploma (in the absence of additional, relevant tertiary qualification) is inadequate is because of the exceptional range of skills and knowledge required to adequately provide these services.

Working in children’s supervised contact services is a complex and challenging role. It should be treated the same as those persons working with the Department of Communities (Child Safety) as it is, effectively, analogous. Our role is to protect children. The question is, if the worker is untrained, unqualified and/or has a history of domestic/family violence, how can they possibly provide a neutral, safe, supportive environment for their clients? Our response is that they simply cannot and should not be able to.

Importantly, we believe that the most effective way of ensuring a high standard of practice is to insist that all supervised contact services (funded and private) are accredited. This would not only increase the likelihood that supervised contact services are delivered appropriately but also that the staff who are employed in or operate the service are experienced, skilled professionals, capable of providing the appropriate level of care and support to these vulnerable families.