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Your submission for this review:

I note that the report compares costs of DCJ versus NGOs in out of home care. Our experience of our NGO has not been particularly positive. As you note, it is extremely hard to keep case workers and we have five case workers in as many years - and they have had varying levels of skills, expertise and compassion. We have had issues accessing extra care for the kids such as therapy. A major aspect that has been lacking is a child-centred approach from the NGO. Part of this would involve listening to the kids - and also the foster carers - about what the kids actually need. Instead there is a tick-a-box mentality - with an emphasis particularly on the relations with the biological parents at the expense of pretty much anything else. Until recently we had a fairly heavy handed case work schedule, with visits each month lasting more than an hour, plus extra time with older kids, even though the kids had requested that this not occur. I fully understand the importance of checking the safety of kids, but this need not take long. I will note that for many kids, case workers are not associated with safety, but rather with removal. I would suggest a tiered approach to casework - particularly where children are on the path to permanency - where case workers reduce visits to those kids, so that they can have more time/space for kids in greater need. In terms of moving kids to permanency it has taken more than six years for this to occur in our foster family group since the possibility was first raised. I believe that Barnados is particularly good at moving kids to adoption - and note with interest their concerns about issues of timing. For most NGOs, encouragement and support to move kids to permanency is still lacking. There remains the perverse incentive to keep kids in care because this is how the company makes their money. Even not-for-profits behave this way. DCJ needs to put together clearer guidelines, facilitate processes, and tweak incentives (and punishments?) to encourage NGOs to shift kids to permanent care. Two years is a long time in a kid's life. The long slow process is a form of state inflicted trauma to the kids, biological parents and foster carers. All of us have been asked over and over again about adoption - and have consistently given the same answer. Rather than giving up on the permanency program - I suggest directing resources at it to fix and expedite it. Give it time to work. Give agencies time to build up expertise and encourage them to do so. Long term - this is better for the kids and cheaper for the state.