



CARER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT SERVICE (CISS) ANNUAL RESULTS

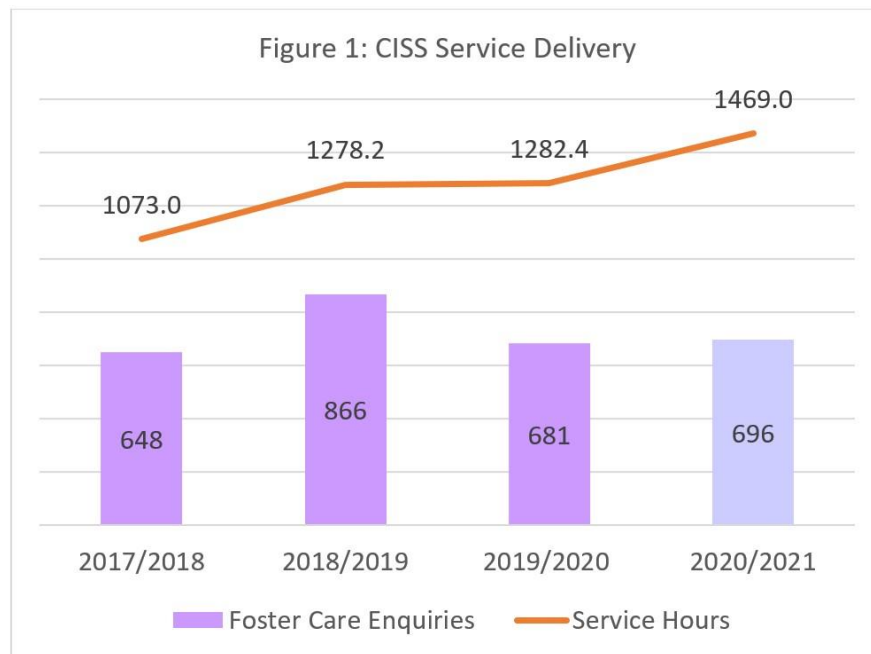
1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021

CISS Service Delivery

From the period 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021 the Carer Information & Support Service (CISS) responded to and closed 696 foster care enquiries, delivering 1469 hours of service.

One of the highlights of the last 12 months has been the establishment of the Carer Assistance Program. This service provides therapeutic emotional support to carers and has worked closely with the CISS program to ensure a comprehensive service to carers.

Many of the carers accessing the Carer Assistance Program have been involved in a CIMS investigation. FCAV has continued to provide a quality service, while staff have predominantly been working from home and managing the unique challenges associated with the COVID-19 Pandemic (Covid). The hours of service continue to increase annually which reflects the complexities faced by carers in Victoria.

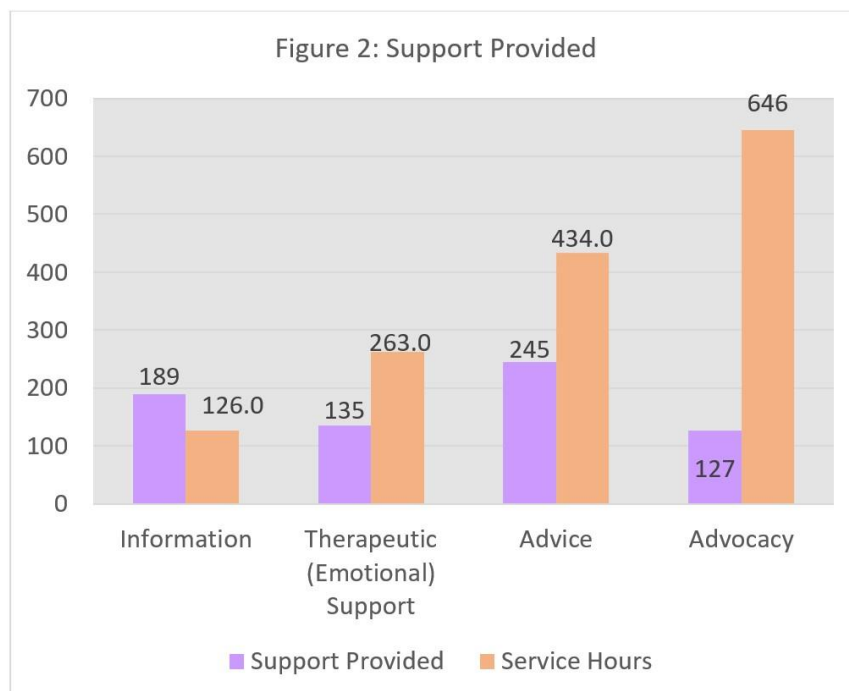


* An enquiry can involve multiple calls, emails and meetings to support the carer.

Outcome

Of the 696 foster care enquiries, the CISS team provided **Advice** to 245 enquiries (434 hours), **Information** to 189 enquiries (126 hours) and **Advocacy** to 127 enquiries (646 hours).

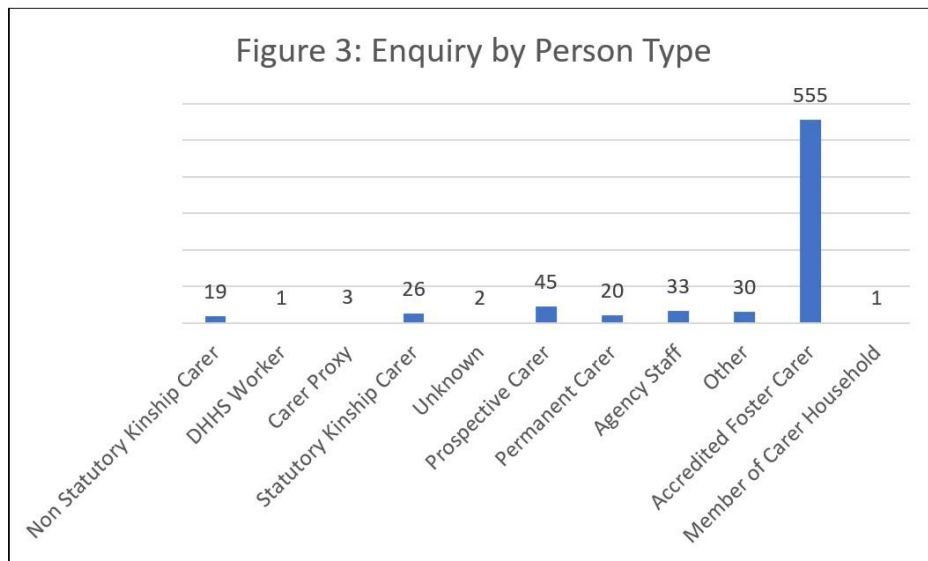
Advocacy is a significant component of the work provided to carers, evidence of a reduced confidence in working with their agencies and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. Often relationships with professionals are broken and FCAV is mediating on behalf of carers and instructing them of their rights in the Out of Home Care system.



Person Type

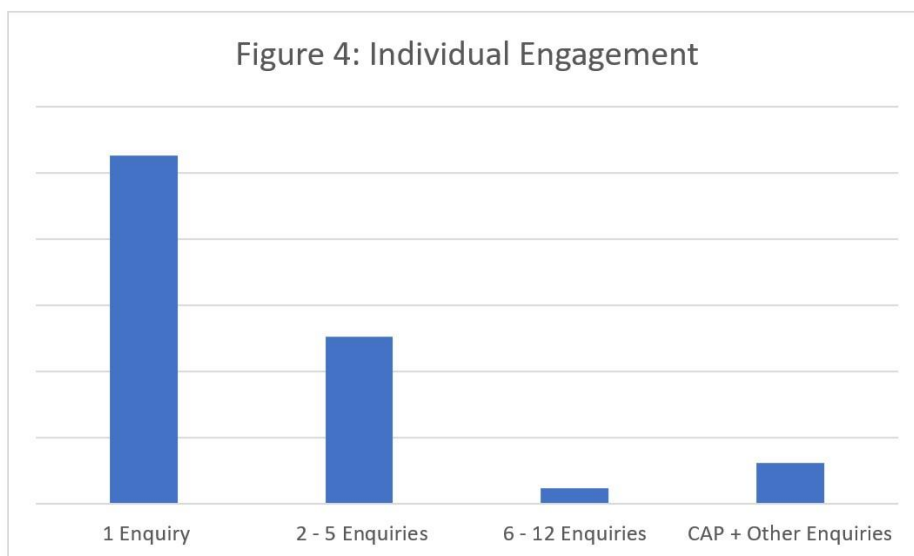
Most enquiries are from foster carers, however Agency and DHHS workers also contact the service for information and advice, along with Permanent Carers and Kinship carers that could not find the support they required elsewhere.

The CISS team refer Kinship and Permanent Carers to relevant organisations. There are discussions at senior level with the other services in relation to appropriate referral processes to ensure all enquiries are responded to adequately.



Individual Engagement

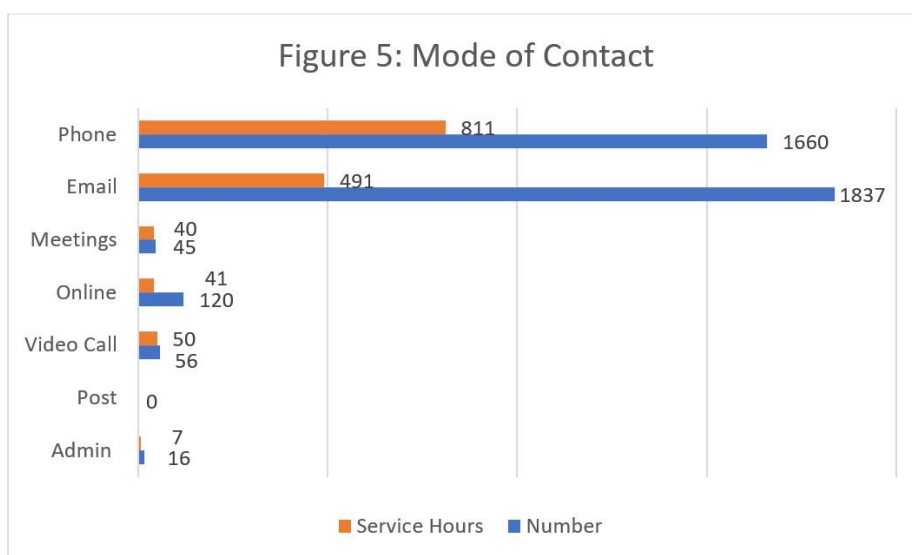
Of the 696 foster care enquiries, 401 individuals contacted the service. 263 individuals had 1 enquiry, 126 individuals had 2 – 5 enquiries and 12 individuals had between 6 – 12 separate enquiries in the period. This highlights that, in most instances, the FCAV is able to respond and answer enquiries adequately. Of the individuals with 2 + enquiries, 31 accessed the CAP service in addition to support in other matters.



Mode of Contact

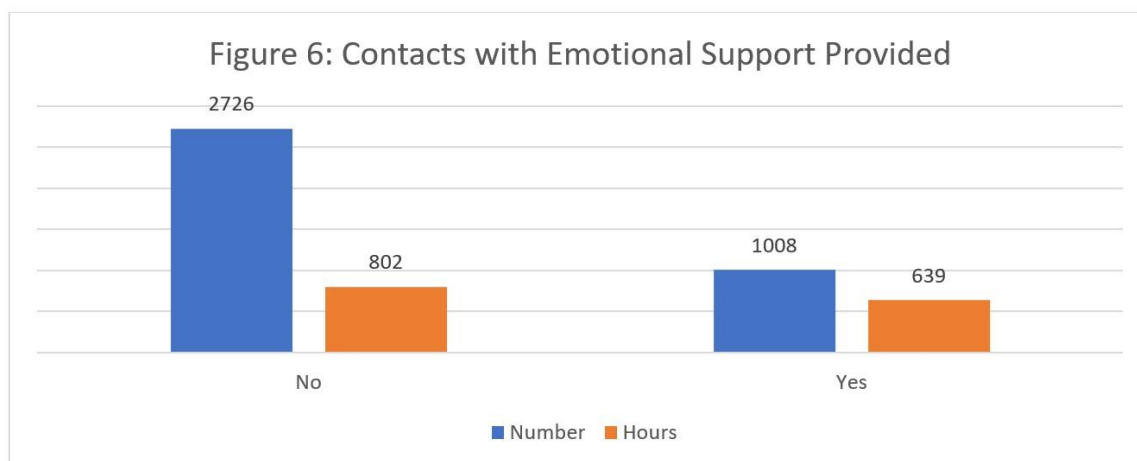
An enquiry can involve multiple calls, emails and meetings to support the carer. Of the 696 enquiries, 3734 separate contacts were made.

Email and phone contact continue to be the most popular form of communication, however in the past 12 months online platforms have been used more frequently to support carers. This is often the platform where FCAV staff are present to support carers during a formal Client Incident Management (CIMS) investigation. The use of online platforms for attending investigations has meant FCAV has assisted many more carers across the State, when involved in these challenging matters.



Emotional Support Provided

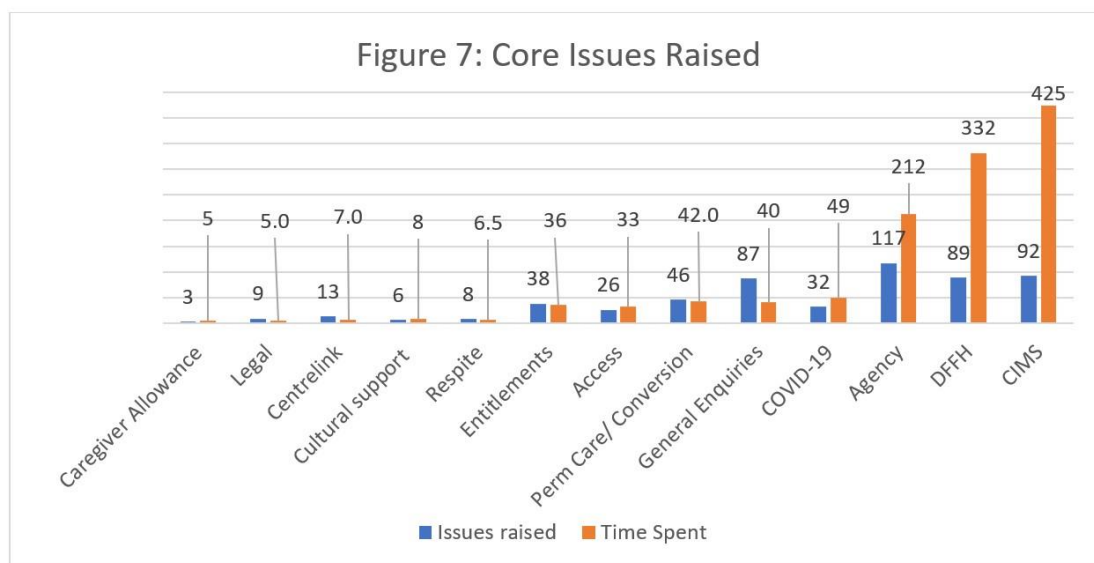
Of the 3734 separate contacts, emotional support was provided within 1008 instances (639 hours).



These figures are somewhat of a contrast to the previous year’s results due, primarily, to carers experiencing less upheaval than was the case during the first and prolonged Covid lockdowns and also due to the referral opportunity with the commencement of the Carer Assistance Program.

Issues Raised

Of the 696 enquiries, 726 issues were raised. The majority of time spent supporting carers was in relation to *CIMS investigations, issues with Agency and issues with DFFH.*



Client Incident Management (CIMS) Issues

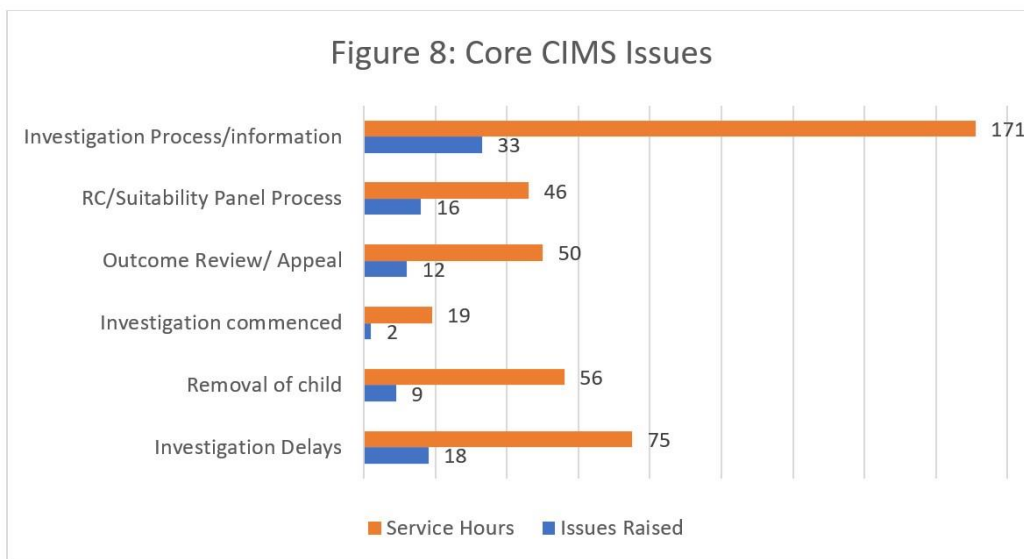
The CISS team provided support to 92 CIMS enquiries, delivering 425 hours of service. CIMS continues to require significant input by the CISS team, from providing initial advice and information regarding the investigation process through to Section 81 investigations and Suitability Panel hearings.

Investigation delays have been particularly concerning over the past year with Covid lockdowns and restrictions or SOCIT officers deployed to Covid-related duties impacting expected timeframes. Carers have experienced delays of up to 6 months for police interviews.

In addition to the emotional toll these delays have taken on carers, there are further repercussions including on their ability to apply for employment opportunities or voluntary work (community organisations, sporting clubs) due to uncertainty regarding their Working with Children status. CISS has supported several carers in these situations throughout the year.

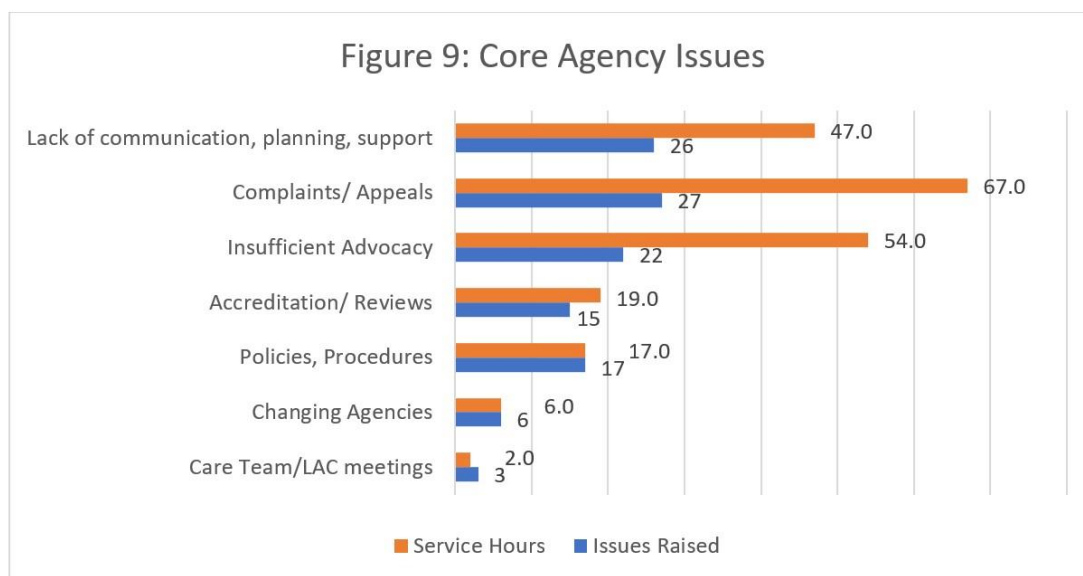
The removal of children in their care during an investigation remains a key concern for carers which has been exacerbated by investigation delays.

FCAV is represented on the Community of Practice Working Group with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. This forum will provide an opportunity to inform and debate practice standards to best meet the needs of carers.



Agency Issues

The CISS Team provided support to 117 enquiries (212 hours) relating to Agencies. Complaints, lack of communication, planning and support, and insufficient advocacy by agencies to DFFH on behalf of their carers have been key issues throughout the year.



Due to the pandemic, there has been a reduced capacity to connect with agencies and take up issues in an online environment. The CISS team has continued to liaise with agencies online and promote the service, including new initiatives such as the Carer Assistance Program. FCAV will resume regular attendance at team meetings as well as carer support groups to promote service as restrictions allow.

DFFH Issues

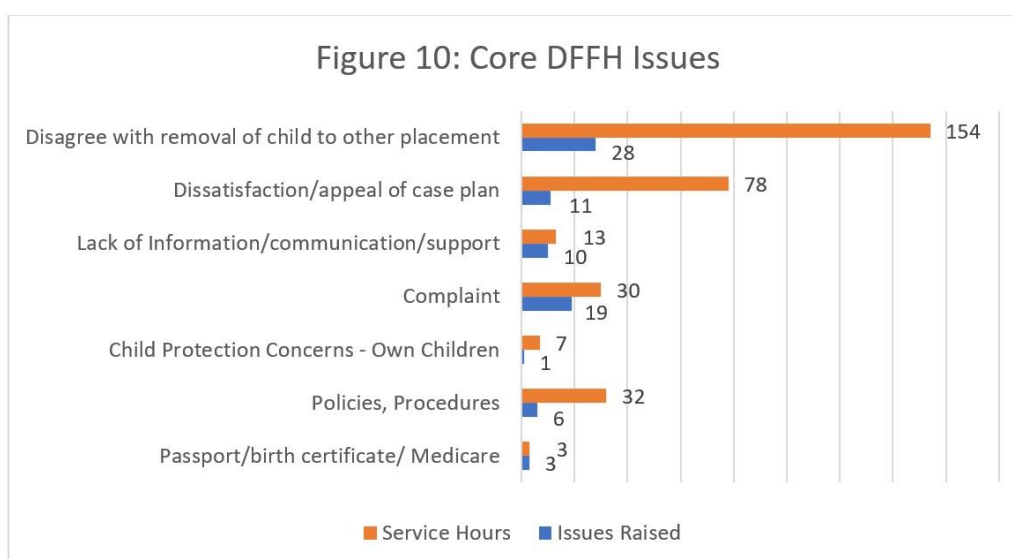
The CISS Team responded to 89 enquiries (332 hours) relating to DFFH. Complaints regarding Departmental policies and procedures, case plan appeals and the removal of children in care to other placements have been a priority concern for carers this past year.

This continues to be a challenge for carers and the CISS team provides and facilitates carer access to training opportunities such as webinars and podcasts to inform them of their rights and responsibilities.

In addition, there were many cases related to interruptions to implementation and review of Case Plans. For example, carers have reported that due to Covid there have been reunification plans that have been either accelerated or placed on hold. This presents uncertainty leading to increased stress for carers.

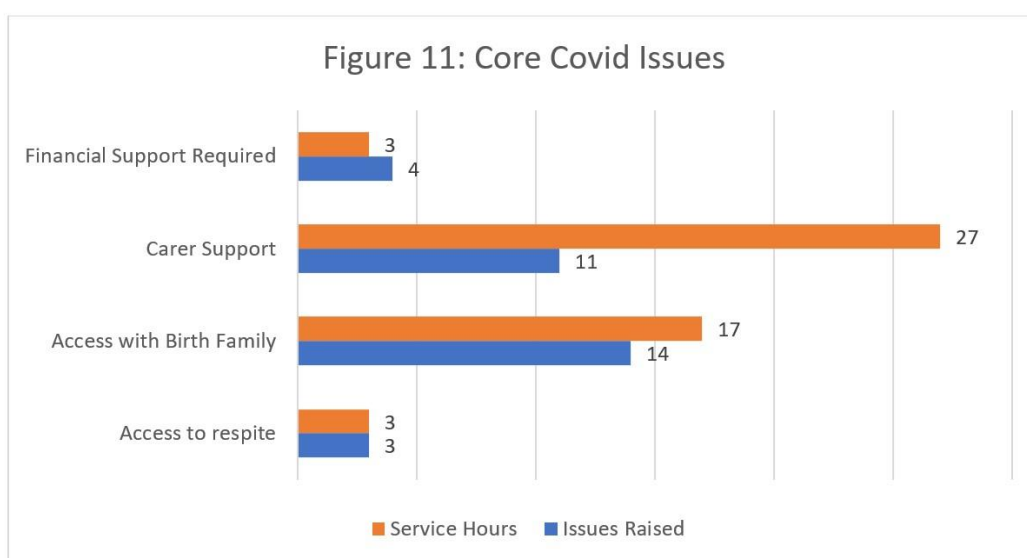
During the last 12 months FCAV has initiated forums called Chat with the CEO to provide a space for carers and agencies to raise relevant issues. One of the most poignant issues raised was the lack of respect felt by carers. Many commented that they have not been invited to attend case planning meetings. Following the Chat session, FCAV has established a working group, developing information resources for carers including a revision of the Case plan template established by the Northern Carer Advisory Group. This will be further developed.

The CISS Team also attends regional team meetings with The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to discuss FCAV services and the needs of carers in the system.



COVID-19 Enquiries

The CISS Team responded to 32 enquiries (50 hours) relating to Covid. The majority of this time was spent responding to carer concerns regarding access arrangements with birth families, carer support needs, financial assistance, and respite needs.



General Enquiries re COVID-19, Access - Impact on Child & Access - Carer expectations re travel, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Summary

As evident from this data, FCAV continues to provide a quality and well-utilised service to carers in Victoria. It's a been a ground-breaking 12 months for the service with the initiation of the Carer Assistance Program for carers which is uniquely placed to offer carers individualised support, often resulting in their capacity to remain a carer in the Out of Home Care System.

Another significant strength of the service this year has been its increased advocacy position. There have been high levels of individual advocacy as well as group opportunities with the newly established forums for carers and agency staff. With high numbers of participants attending and speaking openly about their experiences, the forums have been a well-received and enlightening process both for carers and agencies, illuminating representative issues of the carer experience across Victoria. The FCAV's capital investment in facilitating these forums then feeds back into organisational insight and builds the FCAV advocacy mandate.

Analysis of the full range of issues has highlighted a continuing theme of a lack of respect towards carers and their role. We are in the process of facilitating a carer group to develop resources and articulate what a quality service which respects and supports carers would entail, so that that educational

information can be relayed to professionals in a number of forums including network meetings, sector forums and the divisional CAG meetings.

Another ongoing theme of concern is the CIMS process. It has heightened anxiety for carers during the past year. FCAV is represented on the Community of Practice Working Group with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. This forum will provide an opportunity to inform and debate practice standards to best meet the needs of carers. The first meeting was held this month.

We look forward to reporting on further development of these activities in the next 12 months.



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live. We recognise their continuing connection to land, water and community. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.