



FOSTER CARE STANDARDS: A FOUR COUNTRY STUDY

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WHY THE INTEREST IN STANDARDS?

- NZ does not have national foster care standards
- Growing awareness of shared challenges and learning opportunities
- Internationalisation of child welfare programmes
- *Quality4Children standards for out-of-home child care in Europe*
- *Draft UN guidelines for the appropriate use and conditions of alternative care for children*
- Standards identified as a priority by NZFFCF members and thus the commissioning of the research



OVERVIEW

- Describe the research process
- Identify which jurisdictions had published foster care standards and when
- Explore a foster care standards framework and typology
- Discuss whether standards have been a positive development.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Selection of Aus., Can., Ire. and UK,
- Mixed methods approach
- Methods
 - Literature review
 - Analysis of 28 sets of standards in 18 jurisdictions
 - 38 telephone interviews across 12 jurisdictions
- Sampling
- Jurisdictions - national/state/provincial/territorial
- Inclusion criteria for foster care standards



INCLUSION CRITERIA FOR STANDARDS

- Identified as standards by document title (or in 1 instance content)
- Address foster care or broader child welfare grouping
- Apply across the whole jurisdiction
- Published in some form



FINDING ONE

1: Almost all jurisdictions in the study had published foster care standards - some had more than one set.



UK STANDARDS

- *First Key standards in leaving care, 1996 (England & Wales)*
- *UK national standards for foster care, 1999 (UK)*
- *National care standards: Foster care and family placement services, 2002 (Eng.)*
- *Fostering services: National minimum standards of foster care, 2003 (Wales)*
- *National care standards: Foster care and family placement services, 2005 (Scotland)*
- *National standards in leaving care, 2007 (England)*
- *Training, support & development standards for foster care, 2007 (England)*

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND STANDARDS

National minimum standards for fostering services (2003).

AUSTRALIAN STANDARDS

- Australian Capital Territory
- New South Wales x 3
- Northern Territory
- Queensland
- South Australia
- Victoria
- Western Australia
- Standing Committee of Community Services and Income Security Administrators (1996) *Baseline out-of-home care standards*

CANADIAN STANDARDS

- Alberta
- British Columbia x 3
- Manitoba
- New Brunswick
- Newfoundland and Labrador
- Saskatchewan
- *Standards of Excellence for Family Foster Care Services (CWLA).*



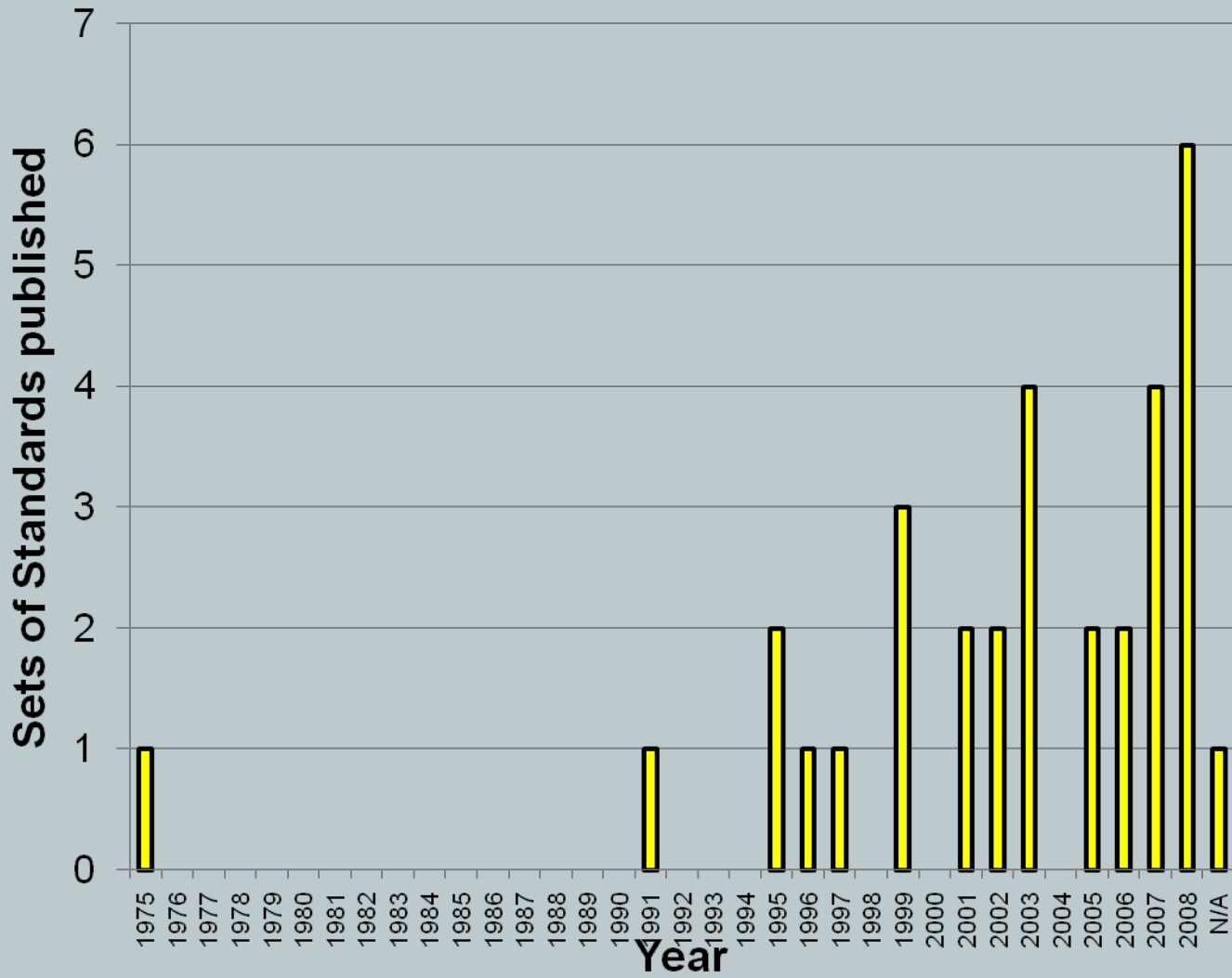
- Standards developed from good practice stories
- 32 countries - 332 stories from 26 countries
- 18 standards across decision-making and admission process, care-taking process and leaving care
- Supported by the European Union
- However limited impact in UK and Ireland



FINDING TWO

2: In most jurisdictions, the publishing of sets of foster care standards is a very recent development





FINDING THREE

3: Alongside many similarities, there were considerable differences across the sets of standards. 32 characteristics across 6 dimensions are identified.



1: FRAMING

Government	1.1: DEVELOPED BY	Sector
Formalise expectations	1.2: PURPOSE	Quality Improvement
Specific events	1.3: IMPETUS	Incremental
Minimum	1.4: NATURE	Aspirational
Voluntary	1.5: STATUS	Compulsory
Principles/high level only	1.6: DESIGN	Detailed



2: SCOPE

Foster Care	2.1: ADDRESSES	Child Welfare
Foster Carers	2.2: FOCUS	Foster Care System
One specialist area	2.3: COVERAGE	Comprehensive
Stand-alone	2.4: INITIATIVE	Part of package of measures or support



3: DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

A single agency	3.1: STATED AUTHOR	A range of agencies
A delegated individual	3.2: DRAFTED BY	Range of subgroups
Adapt	3.3: APPROACH	Develop afresh
Not explicitly	3.4: RESEARCH-BASED?	Yes
None or limited	3.5: CONSULTATION	Large-scale
Small	3.6: SCALE OF EXERCISE	Large



4: DESCRIPTION

Foster care manual/ service specs (BAU)	4.1: PRESENTATION	Stand-alone standards document
Narrative-based	4.2: CONSTRUCTION OF INDIVIDUAL STANDARDS	Criteria-based
None	4.3: ENDORSEMENT	High level
No	4.4: STATUS CLEAR?	Yes
None / Limited	4.5: LINKAGES CLEAR?	Legislation, policy & research
Short	4.6: LENGTH	Long



5: IMPLEMENTATION

None	5.1: RESOURCING	Costed & Funded
Part of Sector	5.2: DISSEMINATION	Whole of sector
None	5.3: TRAINING	Whole of sector
No	5.4: PILOTING	Yes
No	5.5: PHASING	Yes



6: MONITORING & EVALUATION

No	6.1: INTERVENTION LOGIC EXPLICIT?	Yes
None or ad hoc	6.2: FORMAL MONITORING	Systematic
No	6.3: FORMATIVE EVALUATION	Yes
None / Limited	6.4: REVISIONS	Regular / Ongoing
No	6.5: SUMMATIVE EVALUATION	Yes



FINDING FOUR

4: While the development of foster care standards can be seen as part of the globalisation of foster care, from the study context appears to still be critically important.



- History
- Legislation and underpinning philosophy and social policy framework
- Patterns of provision
- Nature and influence of the sector(s)
- Accreditation eg Council on Accreditation (COA) & (CARF) (Canada/US)
- Indigenous children
- Whether foster care is in crisis
- Definition of terms eg ‘foster carer’/ ‘foster family’/‘foster parent’, ‘approval’, ‘licensing’, ‘registration’, ‘accreditation’, ‘kin-care’, permanency and even ‘standard’.



standard /'stændəd/ *n. & adj.* — *n.* **1** an object or quality or measure serving as a basis or example or principle to which others conform or should conform or by which the accuracy or quality of others is judged (*by present-day standards*). **2 a** the degree of excellence etc. required for a particular purpose (*not up to standard*), **b** average quality (*of a low standard*). **3** the ordinary procedure, or quality or design of a product, without added or novel features. **4** a distinctive flag, esp. the flag of a cavalry regiment as distinct from the colours of an infantry regiment. **5 a** an upright support, **b** an upright water or gas pipe. **6 a** a tree or shrub that stands alone without support. **b** a shrub grafted on an upright stem and trained in tree form (*standard rose*). **7** a document specifying nationally or internationally agreed properties for manufactured goods etc. (*British Standard*). **8** a thing recognized as a model for imitation etc. **9** a tune or song of established popularity. **10 a** a system by which the value of a currency is denoted in terms of gold or silver or both. **b** the prescribed proportion of the weight of fine metal in gold or silver coins. **11** a measure for timber, equivalent to 165 cu. ft. (4.7 cubic metres). **12** *Brit. hist.* a grade of classification in elementary schools, — *adj.* **1** serving or used as a standard (*a standard size*). **2** of a normal or prescribed quality or size etc. **3** having recognized and permanent value; authoritative (the standard book on the subject). **4** (*of language*) conforming to established educated usage (*Standard English*). **multiple standard** a standard of value obtained by averaging the prices of a number of products. raise a standard take up arms; rally support (*raised the standard of revolt*), **standard-bearer** **1** a soldier who carries a standard. **2** a prominent leader in a cause.

(Oxford English Dictionary)



FINDING FIVE

5: From the research six types of national/state/provisional/territorial foster care standards were identified:

1: Best Practice

2: Expected Practice

3: Minimum Practice

4: Practice Principles

5: Ambiguous

6: Mixed



TYOLOGY OF STANDARDS

Type 1	Best Practice	Comprehensively describe and promote excellent or best practice. Developed collaboratively by the sector, these are major undertakings that draw heavily upon both research and professional knowledge.
Type 2	Expected Practice	Articulation by Government of fostering standards expected by foster carers and fostering agency staff. Responsibility for monitoring largely at a casework and contract management level.
Type 3	Minimum Practice	Articulation by Government of standards that must be met. Usually apply to the agencies rather than individual foster carers that are subject to independent inspection with associated recommendations and statutory requirements.
Type 4	Practice Principles	Broad statements of principle. May also be expressed in primary legislation and/or regulations.
Type 5	Ambiguous	Apparent disconnect between policy intent and reality and/or policy framework not clear from interviews (where undertaken) and standards documents.
Type 6	Mixed	Standards strongly reflect elements from two or more of above types.



FINDING SIX

6: The development of foster care standards were largely seen by interviewees as an important and positive development.



- An opportunity to focus on foster care
- Collaboration across the sector
- Transparency and accountability
- Level playing field
- Those with a practice quality and continuous improvement focus and as part of a package of measures, particularly welcomed



FINDING SEVEN

The introduction of standards has (as yet) had a limited impact on improving outcomes for children and young people and for some interviewees there has not been an attributable improvement in the quality of foster care.



- Early days?
- Limited systematic monitoring data
- No empirical research identified
- Limited professional and academic literature
- The problem of attribution



CONCLUSION

State systems of alternative care for children evolve over time in response to changing needs and expectations. Care systems are not static nor are they universal. Rather, they are constructs that respond to diverse cultural environments and contexts (Connolly, M., 2008).



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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