
Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Wednesday 21 January 2009

A DECADE OF MISERY FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN

Recently released information from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) confirms a disturbing trend in child welfare statistics across the nation.

Despite a drop in the past twelve months of substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect, there has been more than a doubling in numbers of children in care. The number of children placed in out-of-home care has risen nationally from 14,470 in 1998 to 31,166 in 2008.

“These statistics clearly demonstrate we have failed to get the formulae right when it comes to assisting troubled families and keeping children safe,” claimed Simon Schrapel, Chair of the South Australian Council of Social Service.

“South Australia was one of only three jurisdictions that recorded an increase in substantiated numbers of child abuse and neglect in the past twelve months, bucking the national trend”, said Mr Schrapel. “The report’s authors have pointed to a link between recent reductions in some states and territories and the availability of early intervention family support services”.

“Unfortunately South Australia’s investment in such targeted family support services continues to lag well behind the rest of Australia, despite recent announcements by the State Government. If our community is serious about reducing the harm caused by child neglect and abuse then a more comprehensive and sustained commitment to helping families in distress is required”, claimed Mr. Schrapel. The recent sobering statistics produced by the AIHW add weight to the fight to establish a national framework for protecting Australia’s children – a commitment made last year by the Prime Minister but which has yet to be realised.

“South Australia should be one of the first states to get behind a national framework driving real reform in the way child and family welfare is addressed across Australia,” said Mr Schrapel.

Specifically a national framework would help to:

- gain renewed investment and better coordination amongst existing services to help families and children at risk;
- boost family support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, which continue to be over-represented in child welfare statistics (in SA, twelve times more likely to be the subject of substantiated child abuse or neglect – the highest ratio in Australia);
- improve education options and outcomes for the growing number of children in care and those leaving care;
- establish for the first time a National Commissioner for Children and Young People to help ensure children’s interests are better reflected in public policy.

“Now is the time to act, and to act decisively” said Mr Schrapel. “Non Government Organisations and advocates are showing the way in what needs to be done but governments at all levels must come on board and show some real leadership.”