

Embargoed until 00:01hrs, Wednesday, 25 February 2009

Urgent action needed to give NSW children a better future

Three months on from the publication of the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in New South Wales, headed by Justice James Wood AO QC, Barnardos Australia is stepping up its campaign to see the inquiry's critical recommendations implemented in full.

With the government's response promised in March, Barnardos, a non-government child welfare agency delivering direct help to more than 8000 children a year, is appealing to its supporters and to all NSW voters who believe children deserve a better system of care, to write to their state government member in support of Justice Wood's recommendations.

Commissioned as a result of shocking cases of child deaths as a result of abuse, the inquiry reports that thousands of children, whose parents are often troubled by mental illness or a history of domestic violence, are in desperate circumstances. While a limited number need to be removed from home, many more are in need of a range of services to help their families take better care of them.

In particular Barnardos wants to see urgent action on Justice Wood's critical recommendations – limiting the requirement for mandatory reporting to the Department of Community Services (DoCS) to cases of significant risk of harm only, and the outsourcing to non-government agencies of all other cases, and of foster care services.

"DoCS has been swamped," says Crispin Hull, chairman of Barnardos Australia, writing in the Sydney Morning Herald today. "Children about whom DoCS has been notified have died. Thousands of families in need of help, if not urgent attention, have slipped through the net."

"The size of the problem is of great concern," Mr Hull continues. "There are 13,000 children and young people in out-of-home-care in NSW and these numbers continue to rise. In contrast, in Victoria, where a greater role is given to the non-government sector, the numbers are falling."

Evidence given to Justice Wood by the Children's Guardian, a government agency set up to monitor standards of out-of-home-care services, showed that on all quality measures the non-government sector outperformed DoCS's foster care services.

"Unlike DoCS, Barnardos is fully accredited to provide foster care services, and has been for five years now," says Louise Voigt, Barnardos' chief executive and director of welfare. "Outsourcing foster care to non-government agencies like ourselves will significantly reduce the appalling merry-go-round of multiple placements which is the reality for too many children.

"Barnardos' capacity to find 'forever families' for some of our community's most traumatised children has resulted in more than a third of our children in long-term foster care being adopted."

One death from child abuse and neglect is one death too many. Don't miss this opportunity to join Barnardos in urging the NSW Government to implement real change for NSW children. Write to your state member – download a template letter from the News page of the Barnardos website, www.barnardos.org.au, or draft your own – supporting the full implementation of Justice Wood's recommendations.

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To arrange an interview contact Crispin Hull on 0419 478391 or 02 6161 4427. For further information contact the Barnardos press office on 02 9218 2344 or pr@barnardos.org.au.

Notes for editors:

Barnardos Australia is a non-government, non-denominational child welfare charity that has been helping children in need for over 120 years.

Barnardos is one of the largest children's charities in Australia, caring for children at risk of abuse and neglect. Children of all backgrounds and cultural heritage are helped through a range of welfare programs including crisis care, family support, and both temporary and permanent foster care.

Our vision is that all children and young people will have caring families, in which they can grow up safely and reach their full potential supported by quality services and engaged communities.

For more information visit www.barnardos.org.au.