



# Child Abuse PREVENTION

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**The National Child Protection Clearing House serves as an interchange point for information, research and initiatives supporting work in the field of child abuse/neglect prevention.**

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## National Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse

On 9 September 1997, during Child Protection Week, the then Minister for Family Services, the Hon. Judi Moylan, announced the establishment of the National Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse (NCPCA).

The Council's terms of reference are to:

- provide community perspectives, advice and recommendations on child protection issues to the Commonwealth through the Minister for Family Services, with a focus on preventing child abuse, including neglect;
- report to the states and territories on these matters through the Minister for Family Services (at the Council of Community Services Ministers meetings).

In giving advice to government, the Council will draw on the knowledge, background and expertise of its members, but will also work with relevant community organisations, governments and individuals to ensure that the broadest possible range of views are canvassed.

The new Council replaces the National Child Protection Council and is primarily a non-government community-based advisory council, of which the majority, if not all, of the members are engaged with the primary care of families and children.

### Council Membership

The Council has a membership of fourteen, consisting of ten non-government community members, three state/territory government

representatives, and one Commonwealth government representative.

### Community members

Professor Kim Oates AM MD, Chief Executive, the New Children's Hospital in Westmead (New South Wales) (Chairman); Sister Phillipa Chapman, Executive Director of Centacare (Tasmania); Dr George Blake, Senior Paediatrician, Flinders Medical Centre (South Australia); Ms Julie Clark, Director of Counselling, Kids Helpline (Queensland); Ms Dale Bagshaw, Member of the Family Services Council and the Family Law Council (South Australia); Ms Gillian Horton-Hegarty, Family Liaison Officer RAAF Base Tindal, Department of Defence (Northern Territory); Ms Wendy Machin, President, Save the Children Fund of NSW (New South Wales); Dr Sue Packer, Paediatrician, Child at Risk Assessment Unit, The Canberra Hospital (Australian Capital Territory); Ms Jan Owen, National Director, Australian Association of Young People In Care (AAYPIC) (Queensland); Ms Muriel Cadd, Chair, Secretariat of the National Aboriginal & Islander Child Care (SNAICC) (Victoria).

### State/territory government representatives

Ms Carmel Niland, Director General, Department of Community Services, New South Wales; Mr Yehudi Blacher, Director, Youth and Family Services, Department of Human Services, Victoria; Mr Robert Fisher, Director General, Family and Children's Services, Western Australia.

### *Commonwealth Government representative*

Ms Mary Murnane, Deputy Secretary, Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services, Canberra.

## Council Agenda

The Council had its inaugural meeting on the 30 October 1997. It meets approximately every four months with the next meeting due in February 1999.

Initial issues examined by the Council included the recommendations of the NSW Wood Royal Commission Report on Paedophilia including what action would be appropriate in which the Commonwealth could take a lead and the feasibility of establishing an Office for Children to monitor and report on children's issues.

The Council has developed the following value statement:

'All children are valuable members of Australian society and have a right to a safe and loving environment free from abuse and neglect. Adults have a responsibility to ensure children's rights are respected and maintained.'

The National Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse will consult widely and work towards improving public awareness of child abuse and neglect.

The Council's proposed workplan for the next twelve to eighteen months includes a national audit of current child abuse prevention activities,

reviewing community education as a form of child abuse prevention, and looking at the effects of resilience in children and young people and its applicability to child abuse prevention. Priority topics for Council's research program includes indicators of good practice in child abuse prevention, research methodology in the evaluation of prevention programs as well as young people, and parents' perceptions of the child protection system.

## Research Program

The Council recently selected eight research projects for funding. The projects have a particular focus on the evaluation of intervention programs and the evaluation of preventative programs. Projects include the evaluation of:

- early intervention with children who abuse other children;
- outcomes of intervention through family centres;
- building child friendly preventative health services;
- an intervention program to combat child abuse and neglect and to provide health promotion for children of drug users;
- enhanced behavioural interventions for families notified to authorities for child abuse and neglect;
- child abuse and neglect in the Vietnamese community;

- the development of a model for client feedback; and
- an evaluation of the family meeting model.

The projects are being conducted over the next six to eighteen months across Australia. Further information on Council's research program can be obtained from the Secretariat.

## Council Awards

The Council is currently developing its inaugural Prevention of Child Abuse Awards. These will be presented at the next Australasian Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect in Perth in 1999. Further information regarding these awards will be disseminated in early 1999.

## Information Package

The Council is currently developing an information package on the Council and its activities, as part of its Communication Strategy, which will be available for distribution by the end of 1998.

## Further Information

Further information on the National Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse can be obtained from: The Secretariat, National Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse, Family Services Branch (MDP 69), Department of Health and Family Services, GPO Box 9848, Canberra ACT 2601. Phone (02) 6289 7530. Fax (02) 6289 3750.



WESTERN AUSTRALIA

# Focus on Families and Children in Western Australia

To improve services for protecting children from abuse, the Western Australian Government has established a new independent council, which will report directly to the Minister for Family and Children's Services. The WA Child Protection Council's eleven members are drawn from government, non-government and community organisations involved in preventing child abuse and/or caring for children who have been abused.

Rae Waiter, Executive Director of Ngala Family Resource Centre, is Chair of the Council, and believes that it provides a great opportunity to improve coordination and cooper-

ation between relevant government and non-government organisations.

The Council held its inaugural meeting in May and is in the process of defining short- and long-term strategies. It has an annual budget of \$150 000 with an additional \$20 000 for establishment costs in its first year of operation.

The Council's terms of reference are to:

- promote the coordination and exchange of expertise and information between representatives of government and non-government agencies involved in the provision of child protection services;
- provide the State Government through the Minister of Family and

Children's Services with advice on the prevention and treatment of child maltreatment;

- promote and encourage research into the issues surrounding child protection;
- raise the level of awareness in the community of the issues surrounding child protection;
- encourage and promote inter-agency training on all matters relating to child protection.

*The above information has been reproduced from material published in the WA Department of Family and Children's Services' Focus on Families and Children, June 1998, p.6.*



# Targeting 'At Risk' Families

## An evaluation of the Brimbank Family Outreach Service

ADAM TOMISON

The National Child Protection Clearing House has always been a strong proponent of the view that child abuse prevention programs require effective evaluation. Although in recent years there has been a greater recognition of the need to evaluate programs adequately, with more professionals attempting to implement program evaluations with some degree of methodological rigour, still relatively little is known about the effectiveness of current child abuse prevention initiatives. In part, this is due to the difficulties in applying experimental rigour to the realities of providing services to families.

The following evaluation, conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies and Burgell Consulting on behalf of the Brimbank Community Health Service<sup>1</sup>, is an attempt to evaluate a secondary prevention program taking into account the complexities of real-life family support work and its effect on the evaluation process.

In a previous article in this newsletter it was argued that throughout Australia and across the western world, statutory child protection services were struggling to cope with ever-increasing numbers of reports of suspected child maltreatment, and that a substantial proportion of these reports were being inappropriately labelled as allegations of child maltreatment by those who refer cases to child protection services (Tomison 1996).

Often such cases involve families who are not maltreating their child but have more general problems, such as financial or housing difficulties, an incapacitated caregiver, or serious stress problems. Such cases may need assistance but do not require statutory child protection intervention. Their labelling as cases of child abuse or neglect further taxes generally limited child protection resources (Clark 1995; Little 1995; Tomison 1996). In Australia, government departments have responded to this situation by developing new, differentiated responses to allegations of child maltreatment by child protection services in conjunction with the implementation of various child abuse prevention programs. The aim of the latter is to provide support to families prior to them developing serious problems which require the use of secondary or tertiary prevention resources.

This article presents an overview of the findings of the evaluation of one such secondary prevention program – the Brimbank Family Outreach Service – conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies in partnership with Burgell Consulting (Tomison, Burgell & Burgell 1998).<sup>2</sup> The Service was



Picture: Double Jay Graphic Design

developed as a twelve-month pilot project located in the City of Brimbank in the western metropolitan region of Melbourne, under the auspices of the Brimbank Community Health Service.

It was designed to provide support and advice to the 'at risk' families who were not currently identified as abusive, and to ameliorate their problems in order to prevent their becoming child protection clients and the need for the provision of significant family support resources. The model

used by the Service is currently being implemented or 'mainstreamed' across Victoria as the Strengthening Families initiative.

### Brimbank Family Outreach Service

As a primary care agency, Brimbank Family Outreach Service (the Service) was to assess child and family needs, develop a case plan, ensure appropriate services were put in place to address the family's needs, and, where possible, deflect people from the secondary and tertiary service sectors through early identification, early intervention and timely treatment. Alternatively, it was to ensure that the appropriate secondary and tertiary services were supplied when they were needed to a maximum result at minimum cost, and that the families were provided with professional follow-up after disengagement of the Service. In order to engage effectively with families and to work collaboratively with the family and other agencies, case practice was centred on child-centred family-focused practice<sup>3</sup> and effective inter-agency coordination, collaboration and communication.

The roles of the Service included:

- providing families with information on local community services; linking families to appropriate services;
- undertaking family assessments;
- notifying Protective Services (Department of Human Services) upon assessing a child to be at risk of significant harm;

- providing case management to families;
- liaising with other service-providers in the community;
- administering a flexifund to purchase services and provide material aid;
- maintaining statistics on issues, services needed and their availability, waiting lists, and gaps in the primary care service system;
- establishing and maintaining strong links with Protective Services.

A cornerstone of the role was to be active in approaching families in the role of 'friendly visitor' in order to engage with families and to assist them to resolve or ameliorate the issues or problems that were affecting their health and wellbeing.

## Client Profile

The City of Brimbank is a culturally diverse local government area located in the outer northwest of the Melbourne metropolitan area. Socio-demographic profiles have indicated that Brimbank and the western metropolitan region have generally higher rates of a number of social problems, and poorer standards of health and wellbeing, than the Melbourne metropolitan area and the state of Victoria as a whole.

The target population included those children and their families from the City of Brimbank for whom there were identified concerns in relation to family functioning, parental discipline practices, child-rearing practices, and poverty and/or environmental neglect, rather than actual harm or abuse of the children. Referrals were accepted from families, service providers, protective workers and the community at large in situations where there were concerns about family functioning. The families of children for whom maltreatment had been substantiated in the context of a current notification to Protective Services, or who were currently subject to a protection order (that is, tertiary clients), were excluded.

In the twelve months in which the Service was in operation, 157 families were referred for assessment and case-planning. Referrals came predominantly from Protective Services, Brimbank Community Health Service, the education system, or from families who self-referred. As part of their various case management roles, staff from the Service referred families on to a wide range of practical and therapeutic services. These 157 families formed the population of cases from which this evaluation has drawn data

on the Brimbank Family Outreach Service case management process.

## The Research

The major design features of the evaluation were:

- the development of a preferred case management approach (undertaken by Burgell Consulting), based on the results of focus groups with local workers and a survey-based assessment of the local service resources and case management practice;
- a three-month case tracking study (undertaken by the Institute) centred on the Service, where a sample of cases were tracked from the Service to a number of other services that had been identified previously as playing a significant role in the management of Brimbank Family Outreach Service cases;
- a client feedback survey (undertaken by the Institute) designed to tap client families' perceptions of their experiences of the Service during the tracking period. This was distributed by workers at the Service during the case-tracking period to those families where there had been an ongoing involvement (that is, more than one visit).

The direct evaluation of the role of the Brimbank Family Outreach Service was based on the collection of the perceptions of workers from the Service and other agencies, and some of the families that the Service attempted to assist. The family feedback and case-tracking components of the evaluation developed much of this data.

## Family Feedback

Staff from the Service distributed approximately thirty family feedback questionnaires to those families visited more than once whose case was still open at the that time. Overall, fourteen questionnaires were returned; such a small sample did not allow the authors to make claims about how well the results could be generalised. However, the feedback that was provided was consistently very positive, with the majority of families rating the Service very positively across a number of dimensions. These included the clarity of explanation provided by the Service about why it had contacted the family and the role it could play; the degree families felt listened to and were able to talk about their issues; the level of respect and honesty the workers employed when working with the families. The family feedback also provided evidence that the Service had

adhered to the principles of child-centred family-focused case practice, involving families in a partnership to resolve, or ameliorate, their issues or concerns.

## Case Tracking

The case-tracking study was an attempt to capture the experience of the Brimbank Family Outreach Service via a sample of approximately fifty cases, with each case providing the perspectives of staff from the Service and at least one other professional who was involved with the case.

Overall, 100 questionnaires or structured interviews were collected from the staff of the Brimbank Family Outreach Service and the other agencies who participated in the case tracking. The cases that constitute the sample were collected on the basis that at least one of the agencies participating in the case tracking had had some form of professional contact with the family for which a worker involved with the case subsequently completed a tracking questionnaire outlining their case management experience.

It was clear that the Service had more than adequately fulfilled the tasks of case coordination and planning, and of developing solutions for 'at risk' families in a manner perceived by workers from other agencies and the families themselves as being very effective. Agencies reported that much of their contact with the Service was for the purposes of information exchange and professional consultation, to involve workers from the Service in a joint home visit, or as a result of accepting a referral from the Service and subsequently becoming involved in aspects of the management of a case.

The Service was perceived by other workers as:

- *Positively affecting information exchange.* The Service had greater knowledge of the family and the family's situation and needs. This was achieved as a consequence of its holistic and child-centred family-focused approach, the strength of the relationship developed with families, and the comprehensive assessments that the service was subsequently able to complete. In addition, the staff of the Service had an excellent understanding of the workings of the wider professional system – an understanding they were able to pass on to colleague agencies.
- *Enhancing inter-agency communication and collaboration.* The Service was the hub of a network of agencies and services planning and

coordinating a network-wide response to families.

- *Providing an effective, flexible approach to family support.* Families were reported to have benefited from the involvement of the Service because of the better engagement and rapport that was established, which in turn led to greater family cooperation and a better case outcome, and the case coordination and planning done by the Service (which enhanced family functioning).

Overall, it was apparent from the findings that have emerged from the case-tracking and family feedback components of this evaluation that the Brimbank Family Outreach Service model performed very well. Colleague agencies in the Brimbank service network perceived the Service to be a valuable resource that enhanced both their work with families and the outcomes for the families themselves.

## Inter-agency Coordination and Collaboration

Using the results of the focus groups and the analysis of the wider service network (carried out via the survey of the local service resources and case management practice), a number of conclusions about the relationship between the Brimbank Family Outreach Service and the wider service network were reached.

First, it was concluded that the development and application of uniform inter-agency intake and assessment measures for use by the various health, education and counselling services who together constituted the local service network would enhance the implementation of service models like the Service across both the statutory and non-government sections of the local service network. Specifically, the use of a common format for documenting intake, referral and assessment information for all cases falling within the ambit of the Service's objectives would improve inter-agency communication and collaboration. Such a common format could supplement, and be integrated with, existing procedures in agencies.

Second, based on the feedback obtained in the case-tracking and focus group studies, it was apparent that the Service was able to strengthen the collaborative linkages between relevant statutory and non-government services in Brimbank in order to address the risk to children and families of significant harm of child abuse or neglect. This function occurred in conjunction with direct service provision and case-planning activities.

These findings were used to form the basis for the development of the inter-agency Case Management Framework by Burgell Consulting. This was designed, in part, as a measure to assist the Service or similar agencies to exercise a bridging role between statutory government services and non-government agency networks. This framework was compatible with existing agency practice formats, acting as a supplement to established agency procedures and practices. It would provide an informed guide for colleague agencies when participating in cases requiring inter-agency case management.

## Case Management Framework

The Case Management Framework, derived from consultation with representatives from the Service and other colleague agencies, was intended to form the basis for the statewide implementation of the Brimbank Family Outreach Service model as the Strengthening Families program. The framework incorporates a definition of case management and a statement of the principles and values underlying the framework.

Inter-agency work is divided into two distinct phases: first contact/intake/referral, where an emphasis is placed on working in collaboration or partnership with the client or family as part of child-centred family-focused practice; and implementation of the plan, which includes the development and management of the case plan; identification of cases that will involve ongoing case management and the involvement of professionals for this; and, finally, the evaluation of case planning and service provision.

The framework describes a number of protocols and work practices that would enhance inter-agency collaboration.

### Inter-agency communication

In order to enhance inter-agency communication, and the support and advice that agencies in a service network can provide to each other, uniform procedures and protocols are required. These should include provision for agencies to be able to share case information with colleague agencies that are also involved with the same client families – subject to the development of confidentiality and information-sharing protocols, and undertaken after permission has been sought from the family. Formal referral protocols are also recommended in order to ensure that inter-agency referrals are made effectively in cases where there are child abuse

and associated family violence concerns.

### Cross-cultural practice

The multicultural nature of the Brimbank community required that the Case Management Framework reflect a cross-cultural approach to assessment and service intervention, including an understanding of the role of culturally specific factors in determining child abuse, the risk of abuse and the appropriate intervention. It was recommended that the response to non-English-speaking families by the Brimbank Family Outreach Service and the wider system could be improved. One method identified was to enhance community development outreach to local ethnic organisations and to train people in these organisations in order to build their capacities to support non-English-speaking 'at risk' families and children.

### Risk assessment

Active monitoring and regular review of child safety and an assessment of the risk of child abuse should occur throughout all stages of the case management process. Burgell Consulting concluded that the agencies and practitioners who constitute the Brimbank service network required access to common risk and needs assessment guidelines. Such tools may enhance intra-agency and inter-agency observations, judgements, actions and record-keeping in cases involving child abuse and associated family problems. The tools should be readily integrated into primary service activities and the day-to-day responsibilities of all agencies and practitioners.

Two other specific implementation issues were also identified. First, the considerable time and resource demands placed on colleague services in order to engage in the inter-agency collaboration and teamwork inherent in the Brimbank Family Outreach Service model was not recognised in existing program funding arrangements. Moreover, the outcome-based targets associated with program funding for a number of the colleague agencies would need to be adjusted to embrace objectives connected to the service model.

Second, the non-government agencies involved in the focus groups consistently raised compulsory competitive tendering as a barrier to collective agency involvement in the Brimbank Family Outreach Service concept. Practitioners and agencies believed that the competitive aspects of service tendering detracted from collaboration among agencies on day-to-day case management and service planning.

## Recommendations

A series of recommendations were made in the context of the Service being implemented as the Strengthening Families initiative. These included:

- that there be further development and application of the Case Management Framework to the Strengthening Families programs;
- that the Department of Human Services work to effect inter-agency communication and collaboration, and ensure the goals of the Strengthening Families program are validated in the outcome objectives of other relevant programs supported by the Department.
- that there be adoption of standardised assessment forms and data storage procedures across agencies (in spite of the obvious benefits derived from the Brimbank Family Outreach Service model and their information-sharing role, the accuracy of inter-agency communication and referrals within the local service network needed improvement);
- that the Department of Human Services ensure that the Strengthening Families program has the capability to address the needs of culturally diverse families;
- that inter-agency communication between the Brimbank Family Outreach Service (or successor agencies) and Protective Services (Department of Human Services) needs to be maintained at a very high level in order to ensure that the inter-agency relationship and case management practices remain attuned and to ensure that an

excellent level of communication and coordination is maintained. Regular meetings, case forums and joint training were seen as the cornerstones for maintaining high standards of inter-agency work;

- that agencies fulfilling the Brimbank Family Outreach Service model of service delivery should be allocated adequate funding to allow them to purchase services for clients who may otherwise not receive the support they require. The allocation of funding should take into account the current trend towards a user-pays system of service delivery;
- that as this evaluation was not able to determine the outcomes for the client families over time, Protective Services (Department of Human Services) attempt to determine the proportion of Brimbank Family Outreach Service cases who are subsequently referred or re-referred for protective investigation within one and two years of the pilot project. This follow-up would prove valuable when evaluating successor programs like Strengthening Families.

## Conclusion

This program evaluation demonstrated that the Brimbank Family Outreach Service played a significant, highly constructive role in the assessment and case management of 'at risk' families who did not require statutory intervention. In the past, such families have often not received the treatment or support they required to deal with their issues and/or to prevent the occurrence of

child abuse and neglect. The Brimbank Family Outreach Service was able to develop and provide effective support for these client families, decreasing the probability of the families becoming abusive or entering the statutory child protection system.

In addition, the Service made a clear, positive impact on inter-agency communication and coordination throughout the local service network. The Case Management Framework that was developed should provide a basis for effective inter-agency work as part of the Strengthening Families programs. It is reported that further work refining the Case Management Framework is currently being undertaken by the Department of Human Services prior to its application as part of Strengthening Families.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In April 1998, Brimbank Community Health Services amalgamated with Westgate Community Health and Community Health Wyndham to form ISIS Primary Care.
- <sup>2</sup> A companion document, the Brimbank Research Report (Mackieson 1997) is available from the Department of Human Services (Western Metropolitan Region).
- <sup>3</sup> Child-centred, family-focused practice affirms the primary importance of ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children, yet also recognises the mutual significance of the child and family to each other, and promotes the importance of service professionals developing a strengths-based partnership with client families.

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## Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Australia

The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) has been commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services to produce a national stocktake of legislation and policy relating to the commercial sexual exploitation of children in Australia. The project, undertaken by Dr Peter Grabosky and Research Analyst Anna Grant, in collaboration with AIC Associate, Senior Lecturer in Law, Simon Bronitt and Ms Fiona David, is investigating child pros-

titution, the abduction and trafficking in children, and child pornography. Results of the research are expected to be the basis for Australia's national action plan, pursuant to Australia becoming a signatory to the Declaration following the World Conference on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children held in Stockholm in 1996. The current project follows earlier work at the AIC relating to sexual offences against children, and crime involving use of the Internet.



# Child Protection Reform in South Australia

## Initial Evaluation

TIM HEATHERINGTON

The Department of Human Services in South Australia recently implemented a major reform of its child protection service, which was described in detail in the *National Child Protection Clearing House Newsletter*, vol. 6, no. 1, Autumn 1998, pp. 5–9.

The main goals of the reform were:

- to target investigative resources on children in immediate danger and at significant risk, and to provide less intrusive and non-investigative responses to low risk reports;
- to provide greater consistency in response and decision-making and improved outcomes for children and families;
- to introduce brief, user-friendly assessment tools that assist workers in their casework and, at the same time, provide reliable information to management on the risks to children and the needs of families across the state;
- to target departmental intervention in families where abuse has been confirmed to those cases where children are at high risk of reabuse;
- to provide case management that focuses on family needs and strengths and clearly identifies the progress made by families in addressing their needs and reducing the risks of reabuse.

Although the reform implementation was completed as recently as February 1998, it is now possible to report on certain key aspects of the Department's performance in relation to the first two goals and to make comparisons with the situation before the reform.

### Elements of the Reform

The reform had five main elements. These are described below.

#### *Central intake system*

A central telephone intake team (CIT) of skilled and experienced social

workers was established in April 1997 so that all child abuse and neglect reports from across the state are received on a single 24-hour child abuse report telephone line. A central Aboriginal consultation and response team – Yaitya Tiramangkotti – was established at the same time.

#### *Differential response*

Between April and November 1997, the Department introduced a three-tier response system to child protection notifications, differentiating between children in immediate danger (tier 1), children at risk (tier 2), and children primarily in need where the risk of future abuse is low (tier 3).

The emphasis with tier 3 is on problem-solving rather than investigating a reported incident. The traditional response of home visit and investigation is not adopted in these cases. Instead, the subject families are invited to meet with departmental staff so that the notification can be discussed, perceptions and views of the reported concerns shared and community and/or professional support sought where necessary.

#### *Closer inter-agency cooperation*

In November 1997, formal inter-agency strategy discussions with police investigators and the Health Department's child protection service were introduced for tier 1 cases. Participants in the strategy discussions exchange information and views about the report, clarify roles, and plan and coordinate the most effective investigation. Strategy discussions are also held on tier 2 investigations where departmental staff propose to interview children prior to visiting their caregivers/parents.

#### *Safety assessment*

From November 1997, the formal use of assessment instruments in child protection has been included in standard procedures. Safety assessments

are completed on all tier 1 and 2 notifications.

In South Australia, safety assessment is conducted in two stages: at intake and after the initial investigative visits. The identification of a safety factor at intake is essentially a trigger for an immediate response. If the full assessment confirms that the child is indeed in danger, the worker must then take steps to ensure the child's safety.

#### *Structured decision-making*

The structured decision-making system was introduced in all district centres between November 1997 and February 1998. Under this system, a full risk and needs assessment is completed on all confirmed cases and services are then targeted towards families where there is a very high or high risk of renotification and reabuse. When priority family needs have been identified, workers are required to specify the interventions and services necessary to address them as well as the availability of those services. Reassessments of risk and family needs and strengths are conducted every three months and prior to closure so that the family's progress and risk level can be monitored.

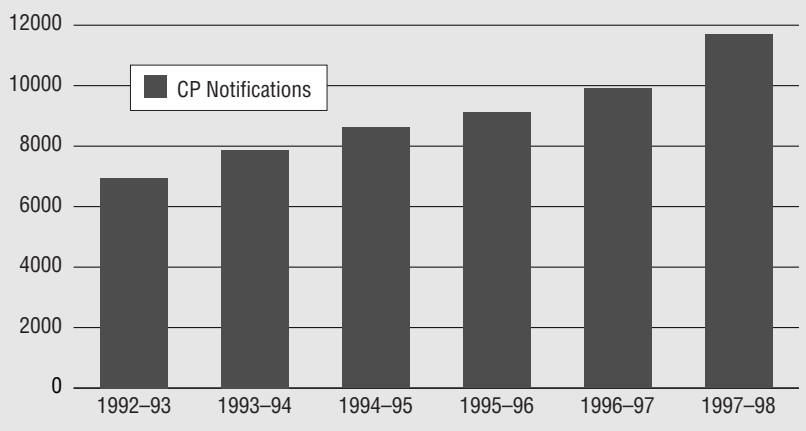
The system generates information on the risk and needs profiles of those families where abuse or neglect has been confirmed, thus enabling management to identify resource and service requirements both within the Department and in government and funded sectors.

### Initial Evaluation of the Reform

The initial evaluation of the above reform measures is based on the following:

- client information system (CIS) annual data on notifications and outcomes since 1992–93 (see figure 1);

Figure 1 CP Notification for 12-month periods May to April 1992-93 to 1997-98



- data on 'screening out' from CIS for the twelve-month period before reform (May 1996 to April 1997) and the twelve-month period after reform (May 1997 to April 1998);
- a survey of all child protection notifications in South Australia in a two-week period in February 1998. This was compared with a baseline survey of all child protection notifications in a comparable two-week period in February 1996;
- an inter-rater reliability and validity study of a sample of fifty child protection intakes recorded between July and December 1997;
- preliminary analysis of 184 confirmed abuse cases where family strengths and needs assessments have been completed (February to May 1998).

## Trends in Notification

The average rate of increase in notifications during the three years prior to the introduction of the central intake team was 8 per cent. The rate of increase in the first year after CIT (May 1997 to April 1998) was 18 per cent; that is, more than double the previous average rate.

Notifications on Aboriginal children have risen at about the same rate as in the previous year. There has been a slight decrease in the number of notifications on children from families with a non-English-speaking background, as in the previous year. Because of the small numbers it is not possible to deduce clear trends in relation to these categories of notification at this stage.

Notifications from mandated notifiers have increased to a greater extent than those from other notifiers; in particular, notifications from education and health professionals have increased by 30 per cent.

During consultations and implementation of the central intake system, some concerns were expressed that notifiers from country and remote areas might be reluctant to phone a central telephone line in Adelaide and might prefer to use their local networks. In reality, the opposite seems to have occurred. The increase in notifications from the metropolitan area has risen from an average of 9 per cent in the three years before CIT was introduced to 13 per cent in the year after. However, the increase in country areas has been more than fourfold, from an average of 5 per cent in the three previous years to 22 per cent in the year since the introduction of CIT. Indeed, in the most remote districts (more than 750 kilometres from Adelaide) the increase in notifications in the year post-CIT has been 30 per cent. Possible explanations for this significant increase in reporting from country districts include the introduction of a free call system, and the greater anonymity provided to notifiers by a central abuse report line.

## Screening

Screening in child protection involves two separate decisions which may be taken concurrently or sequentially.

The first task for intake workers in South Australia who have received and recorded a child protection intake is to decide whether the reported concerns are appropriate and sufficiently serious to warrant a departmental response. If not, the notification is recorded (as 'notifier concern') but no further action is taken by the Department.

Criteria for such decisions typically include the following:

- whether the report, if true, would constitute abuse or neglect as defined by the law and/or by departmental policy;

- whether the victim is clearly identified and able to be located;
- whether the report specifies an incident, a series of incidents or an ongoing condition;
- whether the alleged victim is under eighteen years.

Having ruled out inappropriate and insufficiently serious reports, the intake worker must make their next decision based on whether the child protection issues have already been dealt with by the family or some other party. A notification where the alleged perpetrator has been effectively removed from the family home and where the child is now adequately protected requires no statutory protective action and can therefore be ruled out even though the reported incident of abuse may be appropriate and serious.

One of the major concerns in South Australia prior to the reform was the significant variation between district centres in the proportion of cases they screened in and out. In the twelve-month period prior to reform, the average screening-out rate was 30 per cent. However, five of the nineteen district centres in South Australia screened out less than 20 per cent of notifications whereas three screened out more than 40 per cent.

Significantly, there appeared to be an association between work pressure in district centres and their screening-out practices, with the busier district centres tending to screen out the highest proportion of cases and those with the least work pressure screening out the least.

In the twelve-month period following the introduction of the central intake system there have been four changes to the screening situation:

- The overall screening-out rate has increased slightly from 30 per cent to 32 per cent.
- The range of screening-out rates has been significantly reduced. The screened-out rate for eighteen of the nineteen districts has been within plus and minus 10 per cent of the state average since reform, whereas this was the case in just eleven districts prior to reform.
- The screening-out rate no longer correlates with workload pressure. Indeed, the two district centres identified at either end of the workload spectrum have, since reform, had screening out rates of 27 per cent and 29 per cent.
- Screening-out rates since reform have been lowest in those districts with the highest proportion of notified Aboriginal children.

In the year before CIT, only ten out of the nineteen district centres screened out 25 to 35 per cent of notifications; in the year after CIT, 25 to 35 per cent of notifications were screened out in sixteen of the nineteen districts.

The picture is even clearer when those districts with high Aboriginal populations are excluded. In the year after CIT, four of the five districts where Aboriginal notifications accounted for more than a fifth of the total had screening-out rates of 20 per cent to 25 per cent. Thus the range of screening out in other districts was even narrower than that shown in the chart.

Excluding the districts with high Aboriginal notifications, the change in screening practice pre- and post-reform is as follows:

	Pre-reform May 96– April 97 %	Post-reform May 97– April 98 %
Highest screened-out rate	47	40
Lowest screened-out rate	15	29

## Differential Response and Decision-Making at Intake

The issue of consistency of decision-making has also been examined in terms of the tier classifications made by central intake team members.

Central intake workers are required to complete initial safety assessments and to assign tier classifications to each notification screened in for action. In a study conducted in May 1998, fifty vignettes of child protection intakes were created to serve as a basis for assessing the reliability of their tier classifications. The vignettes were based on a random sample of fifty actual notifications made in the second half of 1997 with added summaries of any prior relevant information recorded on CIS. Identifying materials (for example, the name of the intake worker) and the actual tier rating were removed.

Three groups of five central intake workers and a group of senior staff at CIT were then individually asked to read and assess the fifty vignettes. Workers were instructed to assign tiers to the cases they considered were clear cut and to indicate those cases on which they would consult with senior staff. Senior staff were simply instructed to rate all cases by tier. The final 'central intake tier ratings' were taken to be the workers' judgements on those cases they considered clear cut, combined with their senior's judgements in the unclear cases.

The consistency of tier decision-making was determined by the proportion of cases where four out of five (80 per cent of) 'central intake tier ratings' were the same. Results were compared with tier classifications made on the same fifty cases by five district centre senior staff; that is, staff who were among those responsible for prioritising child protection intakes before the introduction of central intake.

Whereas four out five district centre senior staff agreed on the tier rating in only 42 per cent of cases, this level of agreement at central intake was significantly higher, ranging from 60 per cent to 68 per cent of cases among the groups of workers.

## Departmental Responses to Notifications

In the eight months from November 1997 to June 1998, 8 per cent of screened-in notifications were classified as tier 1, 63 per cent as tier 2, 23 per cent as tier 3 and 6 per cent as extra-familial abuse. Initial evaluation shows that the main impact of the central intake and differential response system has been improved response and investigation rates for the more serious notifications.

In order to provide a baseline measure prior to the child protection reform, a detailed analysis was conducted in 1996 of all child protection notifications received by the department in a two-week period in February of that year. Notifications were given tier classifications by the researchers using an initial risk assessment framework similar to that which has subsequently been followed by the central intake team. Departmental responses and investigation outcomes to the February 1996 intakes were examined in May 1996.

A similar analysis was then conducted on all notifications received in a

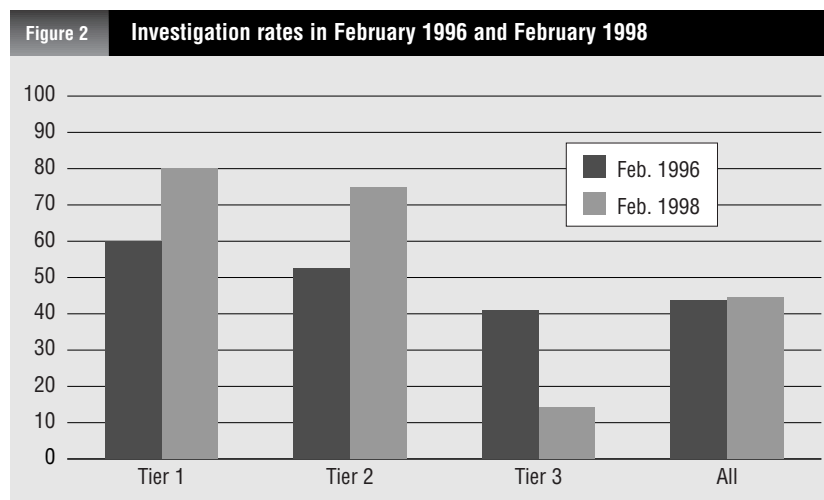
comparable two-week period in February 1998, after full implementation of the reform, and once again outcomes were studied in May. This has enabled a direct comparison between responses, investigation and confirmed abuse rates under the previous system and since reform. (See figure 2.)

The main difference between the two is that whereas in 1996 only 60 per cent of cases rated tier 1 and 53 per cent of cases rated tier 2 were actually investigated, 80 per cent of tier 1s and 75 per cent of tier 2s were investigated in 1998. (An 'investigation' in these surveys was defined as a case where allegations were investigated by direct face-to-face contact with the subject family and where the outcome of the investigation was recorded on CIS.) This strongly suggests that the introduction of the central intake and differential response systems has significantly improved the targeting of scarce investigative resources towards the most dangerous cases. This is borne out by the fact that for tier 1 cases involving children under five years of age, the investigation rate in February 1998 was 95 per cent.

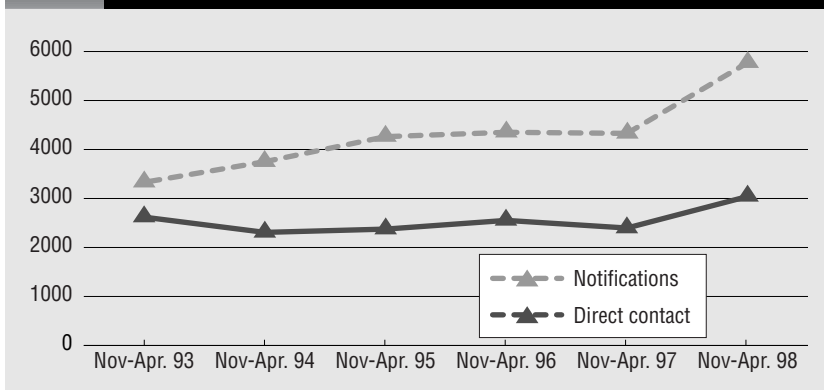
A summary of the findings of this comparative study are shown in figure 2.

(The low investigation rate for tier 3 cases in February 1998 reflects the transition to a non-investigative response to those notifications. In the February 1998 analysis, families attended meetings with departmental workers in 50 per cent of tier 3 cases.)

CIS data for the period November 1997 to June 1998 shows that the investigation rates indicated in the February 1998 survey have been sustained. Over the entire eight-month period, some 89 per cent of tier 1 cases and 79 per cent of tier 2 cases have been investigated. ('Investigation' in this instance refers to



**Figure 3 CP Notifications – total and direct contact**



the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare definition – outcome recorded plus investigations not yet finalised.)

Confirmed abuse rates have also increased under the new child protection system. Confirmed abuse was recorded in 38 per cent of tier 1 cases in the February 1998 survey compared with 35 per cent in February 1996. For the eight-month period from November 1997, confirmed abuse has been recorded in 46 per cent of tier 1 cases and 29 per cent of tier 2 cases.

### Direct Contact with Notified Families

Arguably the most telling measure of departmental responses is the proportion of notifications where direct contact is made with the notified families. Prior to reform, this included all full investigations plus ‘partial investigations’ where there was a referral for services. Post-reform this includes all full investigations plus tier 3 cases where families actually attended the meetings to which they were invited.

Figure 3 shows the trends over the past five years in South Australia, both in total child protection notifications

and in the number of notifications where direct contact was made. It can be seen that prior to the reform there was a general decline in direct contact cases and that the decline was accentuated when the rate of increase in total notifications rose. The net result of these trends was a steadily increasing gap between total notifications and those where direct contact was made. In the first year since reform, these trends have been reversed, with the 18 per cent rise in notifications being more than matched by a 24 per cent increase in the number of families contacted directly.

(Figure 3 is based on comparative data for the six-month periods November to April in each year because the operation of differential response systems at district centre level was implemented at the end of October 1998.)

### Intervention on Confirmed Abuse Cases

The structured decision-making system (SDM) for dealing with families where abuse/neglect has been confirmed was implemented in February 1998 and it will not be possible to fully evaluate outcomes until

the rates of renotification and reabuse over eighteen-month periods both before and after that time can be compared.

However, the ability of SDM to generate critical management information by aggregating case data on the risks to children and family strengths and needs is already becoming apparent. Over the next year, detailed profiles of family characteristics for abusing/neglecting families and the services required to address family needs will become available district by district, and according to risk level.

A needs analysis of the first 184 families (all risk levels) dealt with under SDM shows the following breakdown of priority-identified family needs. It shows, for example, that mental health issues were considered a priority need in 128 (or 67 per cent) of the families where abuse had been confirmed. (See figure 4.)

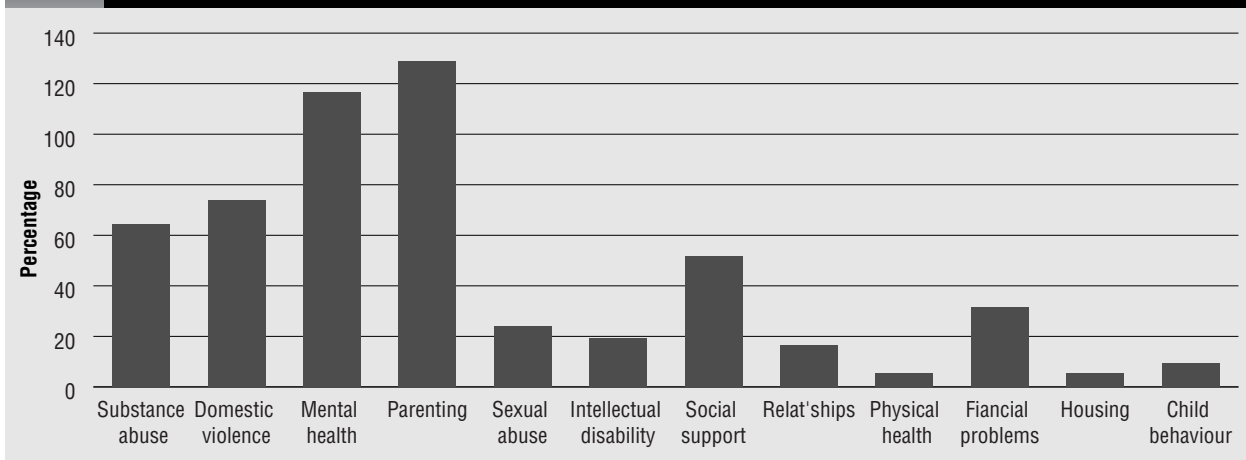
Of course, the true value of this aggregate data becomes apparent when such profiles can be produced for particular districts and subcategories of abusing/neglecting families.

### Conclusion

Although these preliminary findings are based on data for periods of between six and twelve months only, there does appear to be sufficient indication that the recent child protection reform in South Australia has improved responses to children in danger and at serious risk by offering both a more consistent and a more targeted approach. Further evaluation will be conducted on the structured decision-making system next year.

*Tim Heatherington*, at the time of writing, was Manager, Child Protection Reform, Family and Community Services, Adelaide, South Australia. This article is abridged from a paper supplied by the author.

**Figure 4 Family needs profile based on first 184 family strengths/needs assessments, February–June 1998**





# Preventing Child Abuse in New South Wales

ADAM TOMISON

The New South Wales Minister for Community Services recently presided at the official launch of a new NSW Child Abuse Prevention Framework. The framework is designed to help policy- and decision- makers develop comprehensive plans to prevent child abuse and neglect. It has both state and national significance.

The strategy was released as part of a three-document package – the framework document was supported and informed by two further texts, both written on behalf of the New South Wales Child Protection Council by Adam Tomison, Research Advisor for the National Child Protection Clearing House, based at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

## Structural Barriers To Child Abuse Prevention

The first paper (Tomison 1997a) provides a comprehensive literature review on the structural barriers to the prevention of child abuse and neglect in New South Wales and nationally. It identifies some innovative approaches to prevention which attempt to counter some of these structural barriers and to enhance the health and wellbeing of children.

A number of themes run through the paper. The first is that effective child abuse prevention depends on the adoption of holistic, cross-sectoral approaches based on effective coordination, cooperation and communication between all levels of government and between the government and the wider community.

The second is that children do not currently have access to means of exerting power, or of protecting themselves against their own vulnerability. They are restricted in the extent to which they can make decisions about their own lives. Therefore, the basis for any community-level action should be the promotion of child rights and the

empowerment of children and young people.

The third theme is that there is a need to address the current lack of knowledge about the causes of child abuse and neglect and the failure to determine which prevention programs work, caused by the relative dearth of methodologically sound program evaluation research.

The fourth is that effective child abuse prevention requires changing societal perceptions of children, gender and attitudes to violence. Any attempt to change the current culture of violence will only be successful if the broader community acknowledges the level of violence in society and takes responsibility for the problem.

The fifth theme is that a focus on the promotion of children's health and wellbeing is required. It has been argued that there is a need to move beyond traditional child abuse prevention, which reflects a 'negative', problem-focused approach. A number of programs have adopted a 'health promotion' approach, focusing on the promotion of 'positive', life-enhancing strategies. Serious consideration must therefore be given by professionals working in the child welfare and child protection communities to the adoption of terminology and a focus that reflect the promotion of health and wellbeing rather than the prevention of social ills.

In conclusion, placing structural barriers at the centre of any analysis of child abuse prevention is crucial for understanding the constraints on prevention. At the very least, identifying such barriers, in conjunction with a discussion of various innovations in practice, raises community awareness of the relationship between child maltreatment and other social forces and provides the professional and wider communities with issues for further consideration when developing prevention programs.

## Prevention Programs Audit

The second paper (Tomison 1997b) presents the results of an audit of existing NSW child abuse prevention programs focusing, in particular, on primary and secondary prevention programs.

The audit was based on an assessment of 453 discrete NSW child abuse prevention programs gathered from the National Clearing House Child Abuse Prevention Programs database and the results of a statewide mailout and information campaign. For audit purposes, programs that could be classified by more than one program type, for example, as community education and as family support, were counted as separate items, giving a total of 615 program types for inclusion in the audit.

Analysis of the programs reflected the pattern found in previous national audits. Family support and community education programs predominated, and it was apparent that the majority of family support programs had adopted a family-focused approach to prevention – that is, the programs work with children and their families rather than with the child alone. Also apparent was a low number of offender programs that targeted 'at risk' young males and/or adult males who had a propensity to commit sexual or physical assault, reflecting the relatively recent development of interest in this field.

### Some findings

First, many practitioners clearly did not distinguish between dealing with 'at risk' and abusive families (secondary versus tertiary prevention); consequently, many of the family support programs in the audit database dealt with families who had been abusive or neglectful in combination with those considered to be merely 'at risk' of maltreating a child. Thus, programs intended as secondary

prevention initiatives were effectively secondary and tertiary prevention programs.

As a result, many agencies were able to devote significantly fewer resources to secondary prevention and 'at risk' families as a result of the high demand for services by tertiary clients referred by the Department of Community Services.

Second, an ongoing debate in the child welfare/family support community is whether generalist programs should be developed, or whether the focus should be on producing special programs for particular segments of the community. What should be the balance between generalist and specialist programs?

There is evidence to suggest that generalist family support programs are appropriate for some groups who may be 'at risk' of developing family problems such as child maltreatment. For example, parents with a mental disorder and/or families where a parent or child has a disability may benefit from generalist prevention programs, provided that the program is flexible, the family's specific issues can be attended to and resources are made available to provide long-term support where needed. In contrast, prevention programs targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or people from non-English-speaking backgrounds need to be culturally relevant in order to attract clients and successfully reduce the potential for child maltreatment. In spite of clear examples of innovative practice in this area, the audit suggested that the current number of NSW programs specifically tailored for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or people from non-English-speaking backgrounds is quite low and needs to be addressed.

Third, it has been demonstrated that attempts that focus primarily on remedying a single family problem are often not as effective as approaches

that utilise a multivariate, holistic approach. Programs adopting a holistic approach target the influence of constellations of family factors and/or problems, often working in collaboration with other services.

A clear example in this audit of a comprehensive, collaborative approach to the prevention of child maltreatment is the finding that 56 per cent of all family support programs (158 of 281) currently included in the audit database incorporated some form of domestic violence prevention. That is, many programs were involved in violence prevention rather than focusing only on the prevention of child abuse or other forms of associated family violence, such as domestic violence.

Fourth, the NSW community appeared to be reaping the benefits from the existing network of child maltreatment committees spread across the state. Many of these committees, such as the New South Wales Area Committees, local 'child at risk' or child abuse prevention committees, and Department of Community Services subgroups, were important vehicles for raising community awareness via the development of information materials and training seminars for professionals and local community groups.

The committees had a role in improving information-sharing and in encouraging further collaborative prevention projects between agencies (and between regions) already actively involved in prevention work, and appear to be ideally placed to focus local resources (people and funds) and coordinate prevention activity at a regional level. However, the audit also identified a need to enhance the role of such bodies to educate agencies or groups not traditionally involved in child abuse prevention.

The peak NSW child abuse prevention body is the NSW Child Protection Council. Not surprisingly, council initiatives covered the gamut of

prevention activity across the state. It played an important role as the coordination centre to link and monitor prevention and intervention programs through the state's Area Committees and by providing forums for intrasectoral and intersectoral dialogue. Finally, the council had a role in promoting best practice in child abuse prevention, and monitoring government departments and agencies to determine their current work in the area of child abuse and neglect.

Overall, the findings of the audit indicated the development of a strong statewide base of child abuse prevention activity in New South Wales. Importantly, prevention initiatives were associated not only with large government departments or non-government agencies, but had been developed at the 'grass roots' level by community groups or small agencies, often with the assistance of local Area Committees. It was also clear that substantial progress has been made in modifying for Australian conditions concepts and programs developed overseas, resulting in the creation of a range of innovative programs.

It is hoped that the audit will act as a reference for both government and non-government sectors in New South Wales and other Australian states and territories, stimulating and shaping further child abuse prevention initiatives. The audit process undertaken in New South Wales will form a benchmark for a subsequent national audit, to be undertaken by the National Child Protection Clearing House in the near future.

### References

Tomison, A. 1997a, *Overcoming Structural Barriers to the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect*, New South Wales Child Protection Council, Sydney.

Tomison, A. 1997b, *Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect in NSW: Findings from a State Audit*, NSW Child Protection Council, Sydney.

### How to obtain copies

Both texts by Tomison are available at a cost of \$5 from the Australian Institute of Family Studies, or the NSW Child Protection Council, 447 Kent Street, Sydney NSW 2000. Phone (02) 9286 7276. Fax (02) 9286 7267. Email nswcpc@world.net. The framework is available from the Council for \$10.

The complete documents can be read on the Institute's homepage at: <http://www.aifs.org.au/nch/pubs.html>

*Adam Tomison* is Research Advisor to the National Child Protection Clearing House, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

## Web Site for Survivors of Clergy Sexual Abuse

Clare Pascoe Henderson, herself a survivor of clergy sexual abuse, has designed a web page for survivors of clergy sexual abuse in Australia. Clare is committed to educating adults about the difficulties that abuse victims face in disclosing their abuse, and to working for the empowerment of victims. Useful elements of the site include useful contacts, books, and a section on protection skills, driven by Clare's belief that current and previous principles of child upbringing and educating children work against preventing child abuse. The site's address is <http://pip.com.au/~chen> and Clare's email address is [chenderson@pip.com.au](mailto:chenderson@pip.com.au)



# Commission for Children and Young People in New South Wales

## NSW Child Protection Council

The New South Wales Government may soon set up a new Commission for Children and Young People in New South Wales. After the release of the Wood Royal Commission's Report in August 1997 detailing systemic failures in the child protection system, Premier Carr promised that a Children's Commission would be established. The Government released a Green Paper on the Children's Commission in December 1997 and tabled a Bill outlining the proposed functions and powers of the Children's Commission.

The Bill proposed that the Commission would have the following principal functions:

- to promote the participation of children in decision-making that affects their lives and to encourage government and non-government agencies to seek the participation of children appropriate to their age and development;
- to monitor the overall wellbeing of children in the community and trends in complaints made by or on behalf of children;
- to conduct special inquiries into issues affecting children when required by the Minister;
- to make recommendations to government and non-government agencies on legislation, policies, practices and services affecting children;
- to promote the provision of information and advice to assist children;
- to conduct, promote and monitor training on issues affecting children;
- to conduct, promote and monitor research into issues affecting children;
- to participate in and monitor screening for child-related employment;
- to develop and administer a voluntary accreditation scheme for people working with those who have committed sexual offences against children.

The Commission is to give priority to the interests and needs of children in out-of-home care, children in custody, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and other vulnerable children, but not deal directly with the complaints or concerns of individual children, who would be referred to the appropriate agency.

The Commission for Children and Young People will report to a joint parliamentary committee and will be headed by a commissioner, appointed for no more than two terms of three years each. The Bill provides for an eight-member expert advisory committee, comprising people with child-related expertise in the fields of health, education, child protection, child development, disabilities, the law, employment, sport or the arts. The resources of the New South Wales Child Protection Council (but not the Council itself) and the Child Death Review Team would move to the new Commission.

The full text of the Bill and the two related bills prohibiting employment for persons convicted of a serious sex offence against children and amending the *Ombudsman Act 1974* and the *Community Services (Complaints, Appeals and Monitoring) Act 1993* will be available on the Council's Internet home-page.

On 5 March 1998, the New South Wales Child Protection Council, together with

the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies, the State Network of Young People in Care and the Youth Action and Policy Association, held a forum at the State Library to allow for public discussion and debate on the Green Paper and to assist agencies in the preparation of their submissions. The forum included presentations by Patrick Parkinson, Associate Professor of Law, University of Sydney; Dr Judy Cashmore, Chairperson, New South Wales Child Protection Council; and Andrew O'Brien and Vanessa Francis, State Network of Young People in Care.

Approximately ninety government and non-government organisations were represented at the forum – a clear indication of the level of interest in the Government's proposal to establish a Children's Commission in New South Wales.

A report of the forum, edited by Eithne O'Donovan, is available from the New South Wales Child Protection Council. For the Council's submission about the Commission, see the Council's home-page: [www.acwa.asn.au/cpc/](http://www.acwa.asn.au/cpc/)

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*Permission was given by the New South Wales Child Protection Council to reproduce this part of an article from Child Protection Council News, no. 20, July 1998, pp.1-2.*

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## Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions

On 13 August 1998, a Commission of Inquiry was established to investigate allegations of abuse in government or non-government institutions or detention centres established or licensed under the *State Children Act 1911*, *Children's Services Act 1965*, or *Juvenile Justice Act 1992*. The Commission of Inquiry is currently inviting submissions and is required to report to the Queensland Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care by 1 March, 1999. Correspondence should be directed to the Commission of Inquiry at PO Box 554, Brisbane Qld 4003.



# Two Queensland Initiatives

Two recent Queensland initiatives are the project *Kids & DV*, which aims to develop best practice for working with children and young people affected by domestic violence, and *Project Axis*, a new proactive multidisciplinary approach to investigating paedophilia.

## Kids and Domestic Violence

Leslie Gevers

The Queensland Department of Families, Youth and Community Care is undertaking a national project to develop best practice documents and tools for working with children and young people affected by domestic violence. This project, titled 'Kids & DV', is funded under the National Partnerships Against Domestic Violence Funding Initiative.

Leslie Gevers Community Management Services, a Perth-based consultancy group, has been contracted to implement the project over a twelve-month period from July 1998.

This is an important project for all services working with children and young people affected by domestic violence as it will provide much-needed resources to support services in their work. These will include:

- an Internet home-page for information about the project and for exchanging information with other service providers;
- an online database of Australian services and programs for children and young people affected by domestic violence;
- an online bibliography of articles, books and Web-sites;
- proposed minimum and best practice standards for service providers;
- a booklet describing up to twenty examples of best practice in services working with children and young people affected by domestic violence;
- tools for evaluating the effectiveness of programs and services;

- identification of the training needs of workers, training resources and broad training strategies for this specialised area;
- a model for an ongoing network of services working in this important area.

Leslie Gevers Community Management Services is inviting services in all states and territories that assist children and young people affected by domestic violence to provide details of their work for inclusion in the database. They are also seeking nominations for best practice examples of services working with the target group.

If you would like more information about this project or would like to include your service in the database, contact Leslie or Sue on (08) 9336 7717.

You can visit the internet site for this project at <http://www.lgcms.com.au/kids&dv>

# What Is Safety House?

SUSAN FOOKS

Safety House Australia is a nationally organised child protection program providing a network of safe places where children can go in their local community. Established in 1993, it is a non-profit umbrella organisation of the various autonomous Safety House associations operating in each Australian state or territory. A Safety House can be a house, shop or a business that offers assistance to children primarily when travelling to and from school should they feel unsafe, threatened, or harassed. The purpose of the program is to enable children to gain the skills and confidence to feel safe. The program also aims to play a preventative role in community safety, providing safer neighbourhoods for children.

## Educating Children about the Safety House Program

The Safety House Program is taught in schools and by members of the police on school visits. Safety House education equips children with self-protection strategies, with particular emphasis on their safety when travelling to and from school. Parents can be involved by reinforcing the program and pointing out local Safety Houses to their children.

## Internet Access

The Child Safety Network of Australia Internet site, comprising Safety House Australia, the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and

Neglect, Kids Help Line, the Scout Association of Australia, and the National Child Protection Clearing House, aims to provide families, children, teachers and other professionals with information that helps to prevent child abuse and neglect. The site draws together community organisations concerned with the safety of children and the special needs of children.

As the site becomes known as a useful resource, it is hoped that other organisations committed to the safety of children will become involved and help to develop an Internet directory of children's services, which in turn will provide help and information, particularly in relation to the prevention of child abuse.

# Project Axis

*Extracted from Queensland Crime Commission press release*

Project Axis is a joint Queensland Crime Commission–Queensland Police Service initiative. It represents a new proactive and intelligence-driven multidisciplinary approach in the discharge of investigative functions in relation to criminal paedophilia; that is, alleged or suspected offences of a sexual nature committed in relation to children.

The principal purpose of the project is to identify the nature and extent of criminal paedophilia in this state; its historical, sociological, cultural and other causes; the defining characteristics of offenders and their victims; and the past, present and likely future impact on Queensland society.

Its aim is to assess and prioritise relevant risks and develop better ways and means of dealing with them so that overall investigative outcomes, especially in relation to organised, serial or systematic offending, are significantly improved, and the incidence and impact of child sex offending within the state is minimised.

An important subsidiary purpose of the project is to increase the level of community awareness about who

paedophiles are and how they operate. Accordingly, the project team will be taking a close look at and trying to answer some important questions:

- What is the proportion of child sex offences committed inside the family by parents or close relatives compared with serial or systematic offending by extra-familial adults?
- How can legislation and regulations be developed changed or rationalised to minimise the risks posed by the offender and to maximise the protection of children against their activities?
- What are the most effective and efficient law enforcement methods and techniques for identifying offenders and bringing them to justice?
- What are the options for, and the prospects of, offender rehabilitation?
- What role, if any, does child pornography play in the sexual abuse of children and to what extent are computers used by paedophiles to communicate with each other for paedophilic purposes?
- Are there organised paedophile groups or networks operating in Queensland and, if so, what are

their size, aims, structure and membership?

- What is the relationship, if any, between child sex offences and other forms of criminal activity?
- How adequate are the existing oversight and accountability systems within institutions, whether state, church or private enterprise, for preventing, or at least encouraging the reporting of, sexual abuse of children under care?
- What are the relevant environmental or contextual factors, including structural defects, systemic deficiencies and social attitudes or policies, that facilitate or fail to inhibit paedophile activity?
- What needs to be done to create a state environment appropriately and sufficiently hostile towards and disruptive of child sex offending?
- What role should the Crime Commission play in the law-enforcement response to criminal paedophilia, and in what circumstances should its intrusive or coercive powers be used to target those who offend, whether on an individual or organised basis?

At the completion of its inquiries, the Crime Commission will publish a comprehensive report and recommendations on the above matters.

This Web-site is an initiative of the Australian Scout Association, and can be found at the following internet address: <http://www.childsafe.net.au/index.html>

## New Proposal

Safety House Australia proposes that personal safety and community security would be enhanced by an informal and voluntary network of national organisations that are involved in community development and security. Safety House is prepared to act as a clearing house for information about these organisations, and material sent to the Safety House office (125 Bathurst Street, Sydney NSW 2000, tel. 02 9262 3185) will be duplicated and forwarded to kindred organisations under the banner of 'Community Safety Network'.

Safety House publishes the following booklets on the Safety House Program, as well as a pamphlet for parents on the subject of bullying:

- *The Safety House Program in Australia* provides a history of the program,

outlines its aims and objectives and describes the program in each of the states and territories of Australia.

- *Safety House Australia Inc.* offers a brief description of the Safety House Program, the aims and objectives of Safety House Australia and the activities organised by the program.
- *Safety House: Keeping Our Children Safe* describes how children learn about the program, how to become involved in it, and safety tips for children.
- *Safety House: Keeping Our Community Safe – Multilingual* outlines the Safety House Program, and explains what parents can do, in the following languages: Indonesian, Bosnian, Chinese, Filipino, Arabic, Vietnamese, Khmer, Spanish and Turkish, as well as English.
- *Safety House: The Role of Police* discusses the role the police play in the Safety House Program and how children can learn about the program.
- *Safety House: Feeling Unsure? Knock on a Safety House Door* describes in

cartoon form when a child may need to use a Safety House.

- *Safety House Information for Teachers* outlines how the program operates and where teachers can obtain more information and resources.
- *Bullying: Information for Parents* discusses what constitutes bullying, where it occurs, how both victims and bullies behave, how to determine if a child is being bullied, how parents can help both the victim and the bully, how parents and teachers can work together, the role of the Safety House Program, and how children and adults learn about the program.

These booklets, as well as further information on the program, are available from Safety House Australia. For the addresses of Safety Houses around Australia, try the Web-site: <http://www.childsafe.net.au/SAFEHOUSE/shcontac.htm#contactname>

You can find the Safety House homepage at: <http://www.childsafe.net.au/SAFEHOUSE/shhomep.htm>



# Reporting Responsibilities for

Tasmania's new family day care policy was developed collaboratively between the Department of Community and Health Services (now called the Department of Health and Human Services) and the family day care coordinators. Based on this policy, all family day carers will receive a ready-reference document describing how to deal with concerns about children in their care. Both will be launched during the Southern Family Day Care Scheme's Annual Children's Week Picnic Day on 28 October 1998 at Tolosa Park in Glenorchy, near Hobart.

This policy provides the basis for the development of similar guidelines for groups and individuals who are mandated under the new legislation to report concerns. The language and information is designed to emphasise that the care and protection of children is a whole-of-community responsibility and that contact with our intake team does not necessarily constitute a 'notification of abuse', but rather the report of a concern and the commencement of a 'conversation' that should include family members, other support networks and professionals.

## Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that:

- there is a common understanding between service-providers in the Family Day Care Scheme and the Department of Community and Health Services of the concept of child abuse and neglect,
- carers and coordinators in the Family Day Care Scheme are informed about the requirement to report concerns about children to DCHS where there are reasonable grounds to believe that they have been abused or neglected or are at risk of abuse or neglect;
- family day carers and coordinators within the scheme are clear about the process for making a report to the Department of Community and Health Services;
- members of the Family Day Care Scheme understand what processes may occur after contact is made with the Department of Community and Health Services and what future involvement they may have with a case where a concern has been reported.

## Background to the Policy

The Tasmanian Parliament passed two significant pieces of legislation in relation to children and families at the end of 1997. These were the *Youth Justice Act 1997* and the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997*. These Acts will replace the *Child Welfare Act 1960* and the *Child Protection Act 1974*. While they have not yet been proclaimed and statutory intervention continues to be conducted under the previous legislation, policy and practice reform within the Department of Community and Health Services in Tasmania is taking place in accordance with the object and principles of the new Acts and anticipates their implementation.

## Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997

The *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act* has major implications for the community and service delivery response to the protection of children from abuse and neglect. Children and young people have the right to be emotionally and physically safe at all times. All adults share the

## Mandated reporters under the Act

The *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997* (part 3, section 14 [1]) defines a prescribed person (mandated reporter) as a person who falls into one or more of the following categories:

- registered medical practitioner;
- nurse, within the meaning of the *Nursing Act 1995*;
- dentist registered under the *Dental Act 1982*;
- registered psychologist, within the meaning of the *Psychologists Registration Act 1976*;
- police officer;
- departmental employee, within the meaning of the *Police Regulation Act 1898*;
- probation officer appointed under section 4 of the *Probation of Offenders Act 1973*;
- principal and teacher in any educational institution (including a kindergarten);
- person who provides child care, or a child care service, for fee or reward; and
- person concerned with the management of a child care service licensed under part 6 of the *Child Welfare Act 1960*; and
- any other person who is employed or engaged as an employee for, of, or in, or who is a volunteer in:
  - i a government agency that provides health, welfare, education, child care or residential services wholly or partly for children; and
  - ii an organisation that receives funding from the State Government for the provision of such services; and
  - iii any other person of a class determined by the Minister by notice in the *Gazette* to be prescribed persons.

# Family Day Carers in Tasmania



Picture: Howard Birnstihl

responsibility for ensuring the safety and wellbeing of the children and young people in their community.

This concept of shared responsibility is enshrined in the new Act. Caring for and protecting children in a way that increases their opportunity to grow up in a safe and stable environment is the fundamental object of this legislation. The principles of the Act reinforce the importance of offering support to families in crisis and working collaboratively with all concerned parties as the best means of reducing child abuse and neglect.

Within the Act, the Government has called on all adults to take steps to prevent the occurrence or persistence of abuse or neglect. More specifically, there are identified mandated reporters – prescribed persons – who must inform the Secretary of their knowledge, belief or suspicion of child abuse or neglect. The Tasmanian Government recognises that no one agency acting alone can effectively ensure that families receive the support they need to fulfil their primary responsibility for the care and protection of their children. The combined effort of all members of the community and all sectors of government is required to keep children safe.

## Mandatory Reporting in Tasmania

It has been a policy of the Tasmanian Government since the introduction of the *Child Protection Act* in 1974 to require legally that members of certain professions within the community report suspected abuse or neglect of children to a statutory authority.

Initially this applied only to concerns about children up to the age of twelve, but in 1986 the Act was amended to apply to all children up to the age of seventeen. The new Act defines a child as a person under eighteen years of age and the mandatory reporting requirement extends to concerns about the abuse or neglect of any child under eighteen by a parent or other adult responsible for their care and protection.

The *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997* includes an expanded list of prescribed persons; that is, those people in the community required or mandated by the Act to inform the appropriate authority of their knowledge, belief or suspicion that a child is suffering, has suffered or is likely to suffer abuse or neglect (part 3, section 13 [1]).

The decision by the Tasmanian Government to maintain and extend

mandatory reporting follows the pattern of most other Australian states and territories. It also follows a period of community consultation and careful consideration of the issues by the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee established to oversee the development of the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act*.

The Act is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which was ratified by Australia in 1990. Mandating professionals to report suspected child abuse and neglect in the Tasmanian community is an expression of the Government's commitment to the Convention. It also recognises that children are vulnerable and that they need special protection in law. The Act recognises that families have the primary responsibility for the care and protection of their children, but stresses that it is incumbent upon government to assist in supporting and strengthening families to carry out this role.

## Responsibility of All Adults to Report Child Abuse or Neglect

While mandated reporters have a legal responsibility to report, everyone has a moral responsibility to report their

## Key Elements of the Family Day Care Scheme policy for reporting concerns about the care and protection of children

- The welfare and safety of children is the principal consideration.
- All carers and staff have a legal and moral responsibility to make sure children are protected from abuse or neglect.
- When there is conflict between the rights of the care provider and the rights of the child, then the child's best interest is paramount.
- Confidentiality is important but this must not override the safety of children; confidentiality must not be maintained where the safety and wellbeing of a child is threatened.
- To ensure that the needs of children are met in the best way, carers should work collaboratively with other professionals and families in a relationship of mutual trust and respect.
- Carers and staff are mandated to report a concern and the grounds for any belief that abuse or neglect may exist.
- Carers or staff are not mandated to establish or prove that abuse or neglect has taken place.
- Investigation of suspected abuse or neglect is the responsibility of the Department of Community and Health Services or the police.
- Reasonable grounds for making a report conveying concern can arise from a child telling you that abuse is occurring, someone else telling you, or your own observation of the child.

concern about suspected child abuse or neglect of children. This is made explicit in the provisions of the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act. In addition to identifying specific prescribed persons required to report, the Act (Part 3 section 13[1]) states that:

*An adult who knows, or believes or suspects on reasonable grounds, that a child is suffering from, has suffered or is likely to suffer abuse or neglect has a responsibility to take steps to prevent the occurrence or further occurrence of the abuse or neglect.*

The Act suggests that one strategy to prevent abuse is to inform the Department of Community and Health Services of his or her knowledge, belief or suspicion that a child is suffering or is at risk of suffering child abuse or neglect. Child and Family Services provide the first point of contact.

### Child-Centred Family-Focused Practice in the Department of Community and Health Services

In line with national and international trends, practice in the area of child and family services in Tasmania is moving away from the child rescue model of intervention towards a more family-focused approach which perceives the client as the child within the family, within the community. It also acknowledges that children suffer harm as a result of many factors other than maltreatment by a parent or carer which is rightly classified as abuse.

A partnership approach between community members, statutory

services and families, even where abuse is suspected, has been recognised through research as a vital factor in enhancing the wellbeing of children and protecting them from abuse and neglect in the long term. This is reflected both in the object and principles of the new legislation and in its explicit inclusion of family group conferencing as a technique for involving extended family members, community networks and support services in the planning for the care and protection of children at risk.

### Object And Principles of the Act

The object and principles of the Act reflect a significant change in practice from a child rescue model (which tended to favour investigation of specific incidents, removal of children and placement out of home) to a proactive family- and community-focused

approach where early intervention, support and resourcing of vulnerable families and family decision-making are emphasised.

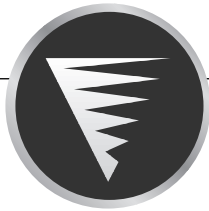
The Act is concerned with providing a response before crises occur. To be successful, this approach depends on the establishment of a partnership between government agencies and other service providers. As practice is directed towards primary prevention, increased importance is placed on community education, training and support.

New service delivery directions in the Child, Youth and Family Support Division of the Department of Community and Health Services have included the introduction of new intake processes, the gradual increase in the adoption of family group conferencing and a focus on improved information-sharing, collaborative case management and advocacy for clients, especially children.

## The Building Bridges Project

The new Building Bridges project, which will strengthen the mutual understanding and cooperation between the Family, Child and Youth Health Service and the Intake and Assessment Service. The development of a protocol between the two services for joint assessment and case planning is a crucial component of this project and it is hoped that it will strengthen the continuum of support offered to families where there is a high risk of abuse or neglect, to prevent it occurring.

Scilla Weber from Tasmania's Service Development Unit, Child, Youth and Family Support Division, has contributed to the development of the policy. Scilla may be contacted at: [sciller.weber@dchs.tas.gov.au](mailto:sciller.weber@dchs.tas.gov.au)



## C O N F E R E N C E S & E V E N T S

If you wish forthcoming conferences or events to be listed in the Child Abuse Prevention Newsletter, and the Institute's Internet pages, please send details to Belinda Snider, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 300 Queen Street, Melbourne 3000 Victoria, Australia. Phone: (03) 9214 7864. Fax: (03) 9214 7839. Email: belinda@aifs.org.au

### **5-6 November 1998 Sydney, NSW**

*'From Rhetoric to Reality - A National Family Decision Making Conference', University of Sydney*

This is a national conference/workshop for those in the family and child welfare field. The conference is a joint partnership between Burnside and Paul Ban from Victoria. It presents an opportunity for those who wish to develop policy and practice in a way that respects the strengths of families to solve their own problems. The conference is of particular relevance to policy-makers and practitioners who wish to move the concept of partnership with families from rhetoric to reality. Guest presenter will be Dr Murray Ryburn (UK and NZ), offering an international perspective of family group conferencing practice.

Further information: Linda Mondy or Lynne Kennington (02) 9630 6866

### **12-13 November 1998 Canberra, ACT**

*'Getting Together For Children', 6th National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN ACT) Conference*

The National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN) is a national organisation working to promote effective care and protection of children as the very best means of creating and maintaining a healthy society. The 6th National Conference aims to provide a forum to consider and debate current best practice in child support and protection, and to consider how to incorporate best practice into the way we work with children.

Further information: NAPCAN ACT, PO Box 112, Garran ACT 2605. Phone: Joan Grant (02) 6295 2210. Fax: (02) 6295 9944.

### **16-21 November 1998 Cincinnati, Ohio**

*'Engaging America's Communities: Joining Together for Safe Children and Strong Families', 12th National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect*

The Office on Child Abuse and Neglect is pleased to announce the 12th National Conference on Child Abuse

and Neglect. The conference theme embraces the growing recognition that protecting children and strengthening families involves collaborative efforts by entire communities. The conference is designed for child advocates, clergy members, corporate leaders, educators, law enforcement professionals, parents, policy-makers, practitioners, researchers, social workers, committed to helping communities keep children safe.

Further information: 12th National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect, 8484 Georgia Avenue, Suite 1000, Silver Spring MD 20910-5604. Phone: (301) 589 8242.

### **25-27 November 1998 Melbourne, Vic.**

*'Changing Families, Challenging Futures', 6th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference*

The Australian Institute of Family Studies invites registrations from people interested in attending this conference, which will provide a valuable forum for those interested or involved in family research and policy to learn of recent research and developments in family studies. The conference will focus on family issues in Australia and feature the presentation and discussion of findings of the Institute's own studies, along with work from a wide range of researchers, government bodies, service-providers and community organisations.

Further information: Annette Dowie, Conference Registrations, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 300 Queen Street, Melbourne Vic. 3000. Tel: (03) 9214 7808. Fax: (03) 9214 7839. Email: annette@aifs.org.au

### **3-5 December 1998 Canberra, ACT**

*'National Children's Summit'*

The Coalition for Australia's Children is an alliance of over thirty children's and youth interest organisations, as well as prominent individuals, which has developed an integrated strategy to facilitate coordinated action and outcomes for children and young people throughout Australia. As part of this strategy, the Coalition is hosting the National Children's Summit. The aim of the summit is to

bring decision-makers from government, business and community organisations together with young people to develop a national policy framework to improve the situation of Australia's children and young people.

With the outcomes of the summit to be presented to the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition in a formal ceremony at the conclusion of the summit, the forum has great potential to improve the lives of a new generation of Australians.

The summit will feature two main streams: Frameworks for the Future, with a related pre-summit forum to be held on Friday 9 October 1998; and Community and Corporate Partnerships, with a pre-summit forum on 17 September.

Further information: For registration details, venues and program information, contact Suzanne Cremen, phone (02) 9228 9406, fax (02) 92214988; or Kerrie Jarvis, phone (02) 9953 5643. To register for the summit or pre-summit sessions, contact the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies, Suite 1, 18 Shellcove Road, Neutral Bay NSW 2089. Fax (02) 9908 4171.

### **1-2 December 1998 Dunedin, NZ**

*'Children's Well Being at School: Safety, Health and Social Issues in Educational Settings', University of Otago,*

From the Children's Issues Centre at the University of Otago comes this national seminar, which is open to all. Issues to be covered include protection of children's safety and physical integrity at school; promoting healthy and caring environments for children at school; the effects of the decline in the welfare state on schools as a context for children's wellbeing; the impact of poverty on schools.

Further information: Children's Issues Centre, University of Otago, PO Box 56, Dunedin. Phone: (03) 479 5038. Fax: (03) 479 5039. Email: cic@otago.ac.nz

### **25-29 January 1999 San Diego, California**

*'Responding to Child Maltreatment'*

The 13th annual San Diego conference on Responding to Child Maltreatment is sponsored by the American

Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC), the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN), and the National Network of Child Advocacy Centers (NNCAC). Nationally and internationally renowned speakers will address the topic from a multidisciplinary perspective. The conference is intended for professionals concerned with child welfare, including those from the fields of administration, education, family support, law, law enforcement, medicine, mental health, pastoral care and research.

Further information: Registration Coordinator, Center for Child Protection, MC 5017, Children's Hospital-San Diego, 3020 Children's Way, San Diego CA 92123-4282. Phone: (619) 495-4940. Fax: (619) 974 8018. Email: rwebb@chsd.org

### **31 January 1999 San Diego, California**

*APSAC Advanced Training Institute*

The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, in conjunction with the San Diego Conference 'Responding to Child Maltreatment' (described above), is offering a six-hour intensive Advanced Training Institute to follow the conference.

Further information: APSAC home page <http://www.apsac.org/advtrain.html>

### **11-12 February 1999 Melbourne, Vic.**

*'The Coming of Age and the Getting of Wisdom', 2nd Annual Case Management Conference*

A call for papers has been announced by the Case Management Society of Australia in conjunction with the University of Melbourne, for the 2nd Case Management Annual Conference. Day 1 explores and celebrates how we have got where we are and what we have learned in the process. Papers dealing with the following fields are invited: children's and young people's services; mental health; acute care/rehabilitation; corrections; community care; insurance/Work-cover. Day 2 explores excellence and expertise in Case Management.

Further information: Michael Sullivan, Conference Management, University of Melbourne, Parkville 3052. Phone: (03) 9344 4490. Fax: (03) 9344 6122. Email: m.sullivan@pb.unimelb.edu.au

### **6-8 May 1999 Melbourne, Vic.**

*'Sex Offender Programs: Successes, Dilemmas and Innovations'*

Under the auspices of the Victorian Offender Treatment Association

(VOTA), this conference will provide a forum for ethical, professional and practice issues identified by practitioners and service systems; the dissemination of knowledge across service systems including legal, victim and perpetrator agencies; ideas for the development of new multi-agency initiatives; and critical evaluative approaches to sex offender programs.

Further information: VOTA Conference, The Conference Organiser, PO Box 214, Brunswick East Vic. 3057. Phone: (03) 9380 1429. Fax: (03) 9380 2722. Email: conorg@ozemail.com.au

### **9-12 May 1999 Brisbane, Qld**

*'The Challenges of Integration', 3rd National Conference on Injury Prevention and Control*

While it is acknowledged that effective integration is an essential requisite for effective injury control, the barriers to achieving this integration have in many areas yet to be overcome. This conference addresses the challenge of integration.

Further information: 3rd National Conference on Injury Prevention and Control, Intermedia Convention and Event Management, PO Box 1280, Milton Qld 4064. Phone: (07) 3369 0477. Fax: (07) 3369 1512. Email: ipc99@im.com.au. Web: <http://www.nisu.flind.ers.edu.au/aipn/3ncipc/>

### **June 2-5, 1999 San Antonio, Texas**

*American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children - Seventh National Colloquium*

APSAC's National Colloquium is a major source of information and research for interdisciplinary professionals in the field of child abuse and neglect. Designed specifically for professionals in mental health, medicine, education, law, law enforcement, and child protective services, APSAC's seminars - taught by leading experts in their fields - provide current thinking and innovations in practice and research.

Further information: American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, 407 South Dearborn St., Suite 1300 Chicago, IL 60605. Phone: (312) 554 0166; Fax: (312) 554 0919. E-mail: APSACEduc@aol.com. Web: <http://www.apsac.org>.

### **7-9 July 1999 Dunedin, NZ**

*'Children's Rights: National and International Perspectives'*

The Children's Issues Centre is pleased to announce its third Child and Family

Policy Conference on Children's Rights: National and International Perspectives. The focus of the conference is how the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is being implemented in New Zealand and other countries. Monitoring and compliance issues and the cultural appropriateness of the UNCRC are among the topics to be covered.

Presentation proposals to be submitted by 12 February 1999.

Further information: Children's Issues Centre, University of Otago, PO Box 56, Dunedin NZ. Phone: (03) 479 5038. Fax: (03) 479 5039. Email: cic@otago.ac.nz

### **7-10 July 1999 Darwin, NT**

*'Children at the Top', 22nd National Australian Early Childhood Association Conference*

This conference has the following aims:

Looking in: to examine the current state of Australian children and their families, to identify contemporary needs; to explore the impact of our diverse history and cultures on early childhood issues; to reflect on individual and collective practices.

Looking forward: to explore the reconceptualisation of early childhood theory and practices as we enter the new millennium; to consider the future of early childhood in terms of political, economic and social change.

Looking beyond: to promote the well-being of children and families; to explore global issues and trends as they affect children and families and those who work with them.

Further information: Children at the Top, GPO Box 2988, Darwin NT 0801. Fax: (08) 8981 0990. Email: brendaja@ozemail.com.au.

### **8-10 July 1999 Melbourne, Vic.**

*'Issues of Rigour in Qualitative Research', 1st Association for Qualitative Research International Conference*

Invited keynote speakers include Prof. Janice Morse (Director, International Institute of Qualitative Methodology, Canada). Other keynote speakers to be announced.

Further information: Jenine Evans, PR Conference Consultants. Email: prcc@mail.austasia.net. Postal address: PO Box 2954, Fitzroy Delivery Centre Vic. 3065. Telephone: (03) 9419 6199. Facsimile: (03) 9419 6400. Web: <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/www/aqr/>

**July 1999  
Melbourne, Vic.**

*'Fostering the Future', 11th Biennial Conference*

Hosts of this conference are Foster Care Association Victoria, Department of Human Services, Victorian Association of Young People in Care, and Children's Welfare Association of Victoria. Themes include partnerships, quality of care, community care beyond 2000, youth in care connecting the world over, whose rights, and who cares.

Further information: The Conference Organisers, PO Box 1127, Sandringham Vic. 3191, or IFCO Planning Committee, Level 20, 555 Collins Street, Melbourne Vic. 3000

**18-21 August 1999  
Pennsylvania, USA**

*'Playground Safety 1999 - An International Conference', Penn State University, University Park*

Conference objectives are to identify, integrate, and explore potential resolutions of issues related to children's play and playground safety in the public sector, in school settings, in preschool/child care facilities, commercial enterprises, and at play centres; to review the status of present national and multinational playground safety standards; to build international relationships for networking for information sharing; and to develop compatible change strategies for the future.

Further information: M. L. Christiansen, Penn State University, School of Hotel Restaurant & Recreation Management, 218 Mateer Building, University Park, PA 16802-1307. Phone/Voicemail: (814) 863 8982. Fax: (814) 863 4257. Email: 1999playground\_safety@cde.psu.edu. Internet: <http://www.outreach.psu.edu/C&I/PlaygroundSafety>

**1-5 September, 1999  
Island of Spetses, Greece**

*'Human development at the turn of the century', 9th European Conference on Developmental Psychology*

Under the aegis of the European Society for Developmental Psychology, the 9th European Conference on Developmental Psychology addresses, from a theoretical and empirical viewpoint, all aspects of a person's development (physical, cognitive, language, emotional, psycho-social and personality development) across all developmental phases (from conception to late adulthood), within the context of family, school and workplace, in a cross-cultural perspective.

Further information: 9th European Conference on Developmental Psychology, c/o Professor Elias Besevegis, Department of Psychology, University of Athens, School of Philosophy, Panepistimiopolis, Ilissia, 157 84 Athens, Greece. Phone: 30 (1) 724 9000. Fax: 30 (1)724 8979. Email: eurocdp9@atlas.uoa.gr

**13-15 October, 1999  
Montreal, Canada**

*'Children and Violence: Our Individual, Family and Collective Responsibilities', International Conference on Children and Violence*

The Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights (OPCR) is a non-profit organisation whose mission is to protect the rights and serve the needs of children in our society. Its scientific committee invites proposals for presentation at their 4th International Conference. Proposals are invited (by 15 January, 1999) on the theme of the conference, and one of the following subthemes: children and violence: the role of media; conditions that give rise to and perpetuate violence involving children; issues related to global conditions: economy, poverty and violence; current perspectives on violence: individual, family and collective responsibilities; prevention of violence: programs and initiatives; moving towards solutions: school, family, community and society, police and the law.

Further information: Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights, 5167 Jean-Talon East Suite 370, Montreal QC H1S 1K8. Phone: (514) 593 4303. Fax: (514) 593 4659. Email: OSDE.OPCR@Sympatico.ca

**17-20 October 1999  
Perth, WA**

*'Moving Forward Together', 7th Australasian Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect*

Sponsored by the Department of Family and Children's Services of the Government of Western Australia, this conference aims to: promote continued improvement of an integrated agency response to child abuse and neglect; strengthen the commitment to prevention of child abuse and neglect; provide professionals with current research and information on child care and protection services and programs; and share information and provide opportunities to learn through debate and discussion about different work strategies in the area of child abuse and neglect. The theme reflects the notion of progression and innovations into the future, acknowledging that working collaboratively will achieve

the best results for children and families.

Further information: Promaco Conventions, PO Box 890, Canning Bridge WA 6153. Phone: (08) 9332 2900. Fax (08) 9332 2911. Email: promaco@promaco.com.au. Internet: <http://www.promaco.com.au>

**17-21 October 1999  
Jerusalem, Israel**

*'Beyond detection: interventions, programmes and treatments for children and families', ISPCAN Regional European Conference*

The International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect invites abstracts for consideration for its 1999 conference. Subtopics include innovative programs in prevention, intervention, treatment; community and interdisciplinary work: learning from success and identifying difficulties; different settings - different populations; ethical questions and dilemmas in prevention; initial intervention programs; treatment modalities; research - new directions; professional training: balancing between generic and specialised training.

**4-7 May, 2000  
Nevada, USA**

*International Parent to Parent Conference*

The Conference, held every two years, is one of the largest conferences of parents and families in the United States. Once again it is expected to bring together parents/families and professionals from around the world to share and learn from each other about how best to support families and develop best practices for people with disabilities. This conference acknowledges and celebrates parent to parent models and philosophies and will provide an opportunity for participants to share their experiences, broaden networks, strengthen friendships and gain new and innovative information and ideas. Topic areas include family-professional relationships and partnerships; innovative programs and strategies; community resources and collaboration; leadership building for family members: strategies for addressing the challenges of diversity and culture: legal rights and the system; fathers; technology

Further information: Cheryl Dinnell, Nevada Parent Network Coordinator and Director --Nevada Partners in Policymaking, UNR - REPC/285, Reno, NV 89557. Phone: (702) 784 4921, ext. 2352 Email: cdinnell@scs.unr.edu