



**A Good Beginning  
for Every Child**

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Mr Shane Donnelly  
Secretary  
Select Committee on the Cost of Living  
Parliament of Tasmania  
Parliament House  
Hobart TAS 7000

Dear Mr Donnelly,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this Committee.

Good Beginnings is a national small/medium size charity that provides early intervention and parenting support programs across every State and Territory in Australia. Our mission is to build better outcomes for children in vulnerable communities through effective early intervention programs.

The Committee is to:

*"inquire into and report upon:*

- a) The effectiveness of the current concessions system and related services, including social tariffs;*
- b) Alternative models of planning and service delivery of concessions including the option of 'bundling concessions' through a smart card system;*
- c) The impact of legislation such as the Monetary Penalties Enforcement Act 2005;*
- d) The impact of taxation policies on costs of living; and*
- e) The likely impacts of increased contestability policies on reducing cost of living pressures."*

The feedback in this letter is based on Good Beginnings experience in delivering early intervention programs in Tasmania and is presented from a practitioner viewpoint. Good Beginnings works with families in many communities in Southern Eastern Tasmania including rural areas such as New Norfolk, Huonville, Geeveston and Dodges Ferry, and some in the North West, including Gagebrook, Bridgewater, Clarendon Vale, Claremont and Moonah.

### Community Challenges

Good Beginnings has observed strengths in these communities in the form of individual and community resilience, a family-focus and strong friendships. These strengths have been articulated by the community at Communities for Children (CfC) Local Engagement Group meetings and the CfC community forum.

Good Beginnings operations primarily focus on early intervention and are more familiar with working with families with long term needs rather than responding to crisis scenarios. For these individuals education is a primary focus; for children to be able to learn and achieve better long term outcomes and for parents to undertake behaviour change in order to manage lifestyle on a budget. Good Beginnings delivers programs that provide education on shopping and cooking on a budget, cheap but popular lunchbox ideas, quit smoking courses. Entrenched intergenerational poverty has led to a lack of knowledge on effectively addressing these issues.

It is Good Beginnings observation that stepped changes in the tax and transfer system (e.g. loss of the Health Care Card on getting a job) have a significant de-motivating impact as well. Organisations such as ACOSS and TasCOSS have documented this extensively.

It is Good Beginnings' experience that the community members who have broken out of this cycle (which takes enormous determination and fortitude) are the best equipped to mentor others, and programs supporting such mentoring should be encouraged.

### Opportunities for Tasmania

There are some imposed requirements that make it more difficult for individuals and families to manage, often resulting in seeking emergency relief. Programs that support the community to address the requirement without setting a reduced standard should be supported in policy and practice.

One example is the management of small infringements such as parking fines. The process to enable management of payments can be arduous and is alienating for individuals with mental health issues. As a result the financial value of the penalty builds until the individual is overwhelmed. A proposed alternative to paying fines is doing agreed community work, using the principles of Restorative Justice. This can reinforce existing community strengths as well as reduce the disproportionately negative impact of financial penalties. Good Beginnings is aware of a program called *U-Turn* that exemplifies this approach. *U-Turn* is a "best-practice" diversionary program for young people who may be at risk of becoming involved in motor vehicle theft. The core component of the program is a structured 10-week automotive training course in car maintenance and body work, delivered in a workshop environment. Young men and women participating in *U-Turn* also work on their literacy and numeracy skills and personal development, and also undertake drug and alcohol education. The program is delivered by Mission Australia, under contract to the Department of Police and Emergency Management, and is funded by the State Government.

Another issue for the Bridgewater/Gagebrook area and many other isolated communities is families driving without a licence. A largely suburban district with limited transport results in community members driving without a licence. This is exacerbated by difficulties in obtaining a licence due to low literacy (and therefore not passing L1's or L2's) and the expense of paying for another test. Many mothers also find access to a vehicle and driving instructor to complete the required 50 hours, particularly when they have responsibility for small children) is almost impossible. Some local community houses have responded to this by providing a vehicle that can be used for the 50 hour requirement and facilitates shared child minding during this time.

Thank you for the opportunity for Good Beginnings to provide this feedback.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Donna Evans', with a long, sweeping underline.

Donna Evans  
State Manager  
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