

(a) • Early identification, intervention and prevention strategies require 'discernment' on the part of the workers involved in the relevant agencies listed in paragraph (a)

- Events clearly show that this discernment is lacking.  
Having worked with troubled families for 35 years I asked myself how I developed discernment and the answer is exposure to and respect for people and their problems. Degrees and qualifications bring knowledge but discernment comes through exposure to the abused and neglected and if you can't love them, then you are ill equipped and unworthy to serve them.  
Those who have gained the precious gift of discernment are barely aware of the privilege and those who don't possess it are unaware that they lack it. For the well being of the children and CAO has an obligation to get this right.  
Families and individuals battling for survival are very often inconsistent and difficult to read. They adapt their story to suit or please the person they are telling. Workers need discernment to penetrate this people pleasing behaviour and reach the truth.
- Teachers are exposed to troubled individuals and families every day yet they are a virtually untapped source of 'discernment' that can never be learnt from books.  
Teachers are in the front line and could/should be involved in the decision making. Since they see the kids every day they are in a perfect position to alert agencies such as Family Support and Child Protection on a child's behalf – I wonder if the Dept of Education permits this?
- We suggest that Child Protection have a person of discernment at the core of each case management team. A person that has a 'real relationship' with the child and access to nominated persons acquainted with the child's story located in the other agencies and with the power to act.
- Police and Citizens Youth Clubs are extremely valuable and reliable but there are nowhere near enough of them. If run by a vocational leader they present a safe environment and a very good role model for fatherless boys. I phoned Dr. Bury, Mayor of Kingston and suggested to him the need for a PCYC in Kingborough. There are many boys growing up without a father or suffering a procession of serial fathers.

(b) The tone of item (b) with its reference to mechanisms, best practice care and service delivery is more indicative of a supply warehouse than a group of caring people with genuine concern for the health and well being of families and individuals.

- A person's choice of language clearly demonstrates, particularly to a suffering person, whether they have genuine care and concern for them in their situation.  
Departmental language also conveys a great deal beyond the text.
- Society is now experiencing intergenerational problems. People have inherited sick behaviours over two or three generations and, knowing no other way, perpetuate the associated problems. If we are ever to assist these families we need to introduce them to other behaviour models – some excellent results are coming from schools that provide "Launch into Learning programs" for birth to 4 year olds. The parents simply love the experience. Then there is "CHOICES, DECISIONS AND OUTCOMES"  
[www.cdo.net.au](http://www.cdo.net.au)

Every choice or action has a consequence and it is important that people be brought to recognize this.

- I worked with addicts and their families for 22 years. In so doing I discovered that their eschewed family dynamics are endlessly replicated. There is no change without awareness and workers should become aware of these replicated patterns in families affected by addiction and seek methods and programs to assist them to break the patterns. The power is with the family and workers can only locate and make known to families programs where they may learn to improve their family dynamics and cease their reactive behaviour. Change can be achieved through just one well-motivated family member learning a new way. The more family members prepared to attend programs the quicker change comes about.

- “Harm minimisation” perpetuates the problem of alcohol and drug abuse, because even if it worked, and it doesn’t, once addicted ‘a little’ is never enough, Harm Minimisation perpetuates ‘harm’ as indicated in it’s title.

We would like all Family Support and Child Protection Workers to attend drug and alcohol programs in order to accept that we are a nation of addict and if we are to beat this sickness we need to understand it.

The Holyoake and Bridge Programs are a reliable source of insight to addiction that has a flow on effect in the family. Also attending open meetings of Alcoholic’s Anonymous, Narcotic’s Anonymous, Over Eater’s Anonymous (for all eating disorders), Gambler’s Anonymous or Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous. The Four Corners programme on the 8 Nov. presented a very clear insight to the dangers of gambling. An insatiable need for sex is another addiction that is endemic.

© Why the ‘Government’s Response’ to The Commissioner’s Report rather than his report?  
We believe that the Children’s Commissioner’s report had great merit

- There has been a rash of sexual assaults including that of the prostitution of a 12 year old girl to as many as 200 men, this is a shocking symptom of a serious malaise. I am reliably informed that even little people are sexually abusing each other and receiving help at Gallileo House. This requires us to find out why the appetite for sex has become insatiable? Maybe the people working with these kids can give us some answers. We know that the 12 year old was prostituted to earn money for her mother’s drugs but the appetite for Kiddie porn may have influenced her customers.
- (d) We really don’t think that poverty contributes greatly to child abuse and neglect but we know that homelessness, alcohol and/or drug abuse and serial and or abusive partners do. Prohibitive rents have forced many families to seek refuge with relatives or to live in cars and this is unacceptable. One of our members worked to get a housing department home for a mother and her six children who were living in a car parked in a quarry. I never thought I would refer to children as feral but these children were. At that time they found emergency accommodation at Caroline House that ran two houses for homeless women until they lost funding for this outstanding work – it was many weeks before the Housing Dept. provided a house for the family.
- (e) Why do people use alcohol and drugs legal and illegal to change the way they feel? Maybe it’s because all our learning is head learning and, generally speaking we don’t know much about ‘feelings’ - that carry very important messages that we simply don’t get if we are not in touch with our feelings - consider the number of women who have a long list of abusive relationships.

Frankly there is nothing new about the stories that have hit the media recently. I have been very much aware of the shortcomings of child protection for many years and since these last scandals I have chided myself for not involving the law. My attempts to rectify things by bringing them to the attention of the agencies involved were tolerated but never achieved any change. It is time to explore better ways of statutory intervention in the lives of families.

Even the long-term foster carers on whom the department relies are now quitting because of the atrocious behaviour of the young people entrusted to them. Frankly they will be hard to replace because it's such a difficult and thankless task. I know some of them and they have served well over many years but have now "Had enough!"

Catholic Women's League Tas. Inc. make the following suggestions:

- select the right people for this work that is so important - much more than just a job
- choose staff that possess both judgement and discretion
- a big part of their training should comprise exposure to people who have been brought up in homes where they have suffered verbal and physical abuse, the sick behaviour and poor example of substance abusers, where there was an absence of dignity and respect for each other – survived and have found a satisfactory existence. This would surely help those who 'serve' to understand "*so that they don't criticize what they don't understand.*" *Bob Dylan*
- It would be a bonus if duly qualified 'survivors' were to be employed by DHHS.
- There must always be an analysis of the situation by a competent planner prior to a team being selected to work with this individual or family. The team should have the power to co-opt a specialist if required.
- A recognition that no matter how bad things are kids rarely want to be removed and love their parents no matter what! There must be grave reason to remove them
- **a modus operandi must be decided on, kept to and reviewed regularly by the team with particular input from and support for the core person**
- no worker should have to undertake this arduous task without adequate support from the team
- **every child under supervision or in care should have a trained 'best friend'** appointed to them. This volunteer should visit fortnightly or monthly and have the department listen to and respect his/her insights into the situation – even recommend removal. I fostered a child many years ago who lost her mother at the age of 5 she is now part of our family as well as her birth family. I would like to see the 'best friend' remain constant in the child's life.

### **ABOVE ALL WE WISH TO AVOID MORE OF THE SAME!**

**Much as we applaud the establishment of a Children's Court it should not substitute for a statutory parent with a heart. Rather, both The Court and the DHHS need to model how loving parents focus on the primacy of a child's interests, placing their children needs before their own, in recognition that our children are the nations greatest asset.**

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