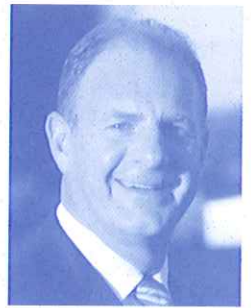




HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

0006



**PETER GUTWEIN  
MP**

**Liberal Member  
for Bass**

**Shadow Treasurer  
Shadow Minister for  
Energy  
Shadow Minister for  
Industry**

5 November 2010

Mr Shane Donnelly  
Secretary  
Select Committee on Child Protection  
Parliament of Tasmania  
Parliament House  
HOBART TAS

Dear <sup>Shane,</sup>  
~~Mr Donnelly~~

I have received the attached submission on behalf of a person who works in the child protection system and who wants to remain anonymous.

Thank you for presenting this submission to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

**Peter Gutwein MP  
Liberal Member for Bass**

Enc

Shane,  
I would be  
happy to present  
on this matter to  
the committee if  
at all possible.  
Peter

4th Floor  
Henty House  
One Civic Square  
Launceston Tas 7250

Phone: (03) 6336 2671  
Fax: (03) 6336 2255

Email:  
peter.gutwein@  
parliament.tas.gov.au

Web:  
www.petergutwein.com

## CHILD PROTECTION CONCERNS

### OLD SYSTEM

Under the old system the child protection caseworkers introduced the families to NGO workers and together we worked to address those issues that needed attention. The concerns raised were placed on a case plan and regular contact with child protection and the occasional joint visit enabled us to work together in assisting the families to make positive changes.

After a period of time the child protection worker withdrew. The NGO worker continued working with the family for a further period. The case file with the non government agency would be closed when the family was functioning well and the areas of concern raised in the initial referral had been resolved.

### NEW SYSTEM

The new Gateway system is not supporting families in the same manner. Often referrals are taken over the phone and then allocated. The NGO worker then discovers a myriad of issues that were not known to the person dealing with the client initially. Clients under this new system are referred to the Gateway for case allocation. They are then allocated to a non government service such as Baptcare, Uniting Care, Anglicare or others.

It appears that once referrals to services to address issues have been put in place cases are closed without waiting to ensure that the clients are attending the appointments on a regular basis to gain their new skills.

This distorts the outcomes as it may appear on the surface to have been resolved however, unless the parents respond and maintain a standard of appropriate care the children continue to be at risk.

One family was told their case would be closed if they engaged with an IFSS worker and attended a parenting program. The client agreed to do this. Once the case was closed they failed to attend the parenting course as agreed. They just wanted to get Child Protection off their back.

The closure of cases by Child Protection once they are supported by a Gateway service has meant that there is an expectancy by the worker to monitor the family on Child Protection's behalf.

### SINGLE WORKER MODEL

The single worker model is of concern especially with regard to personal safety and working in remote areas. On one occasion it was mentioned that there were guns in a house where a worker was expected to visit a family. The child protection worker stated there was no risk to the worker in visiting the home.

The child protection worker also mentioned that there were issues with drug and alcohol use in this particular home. It appeared at the time that there was no concern for the safety of the worker who was expected to support this family. These rash decisions place lone workers at risk and can have tragic outcomes.

## 2.

### **LIAISON WITH HOUSING**

There is a family living in squalor with dog faeces on the furniture and rats in the kitchen. This is a Housing department property and when enquiries were made as to whether the home had been recently inspected the answer was "no". A suggestion that it may be a good idea as there were small children living in the home was met with a response "what do you want me to do about it?"

### **LACK OF RESPONSE AND FEEDBACK FROM NOTIFICATIONS**

There is a family with small children known to the child protection service who are emotionally abused on a daily basis. Parents under the influence of drugs are responsible for caring for these little ones.

Their lack of supervision and poor hygiene has resulted in these children becoming unwell with chest infections and skin conditions which are not treated.

The parents aren't able to function and neglect their children on a daily basis. These are children who are known to the department and have been referred to a Gateway service. Notifications have not resulted in any departmental action being taken as the children remain at risk of harm.

Many workers are frustrated by the lack of responses from child protection when they make a notification. A small child with a burn injury was not investigated until after the injury had healed.

There is no feedback from child protection with regard to these notifications.

One family sends their small girls aged 4 and 6 to stay with an adult male on their own individually. These little girls are extremely sad at times. For the children to access counselling they need the consent of both parents. This can be very difficult to obtain where parents are separated. Parents also know that counselling can be a time when children will reveal the extent of abuse to a counsellor and as mandatory reporters they are obligated to report this. This is often a reason why parents do not consent to counselling even though it has been recommended by a school, health worker or other support worker known to the child.

### **PARENTAL ACCESS TO CHILDREN**

One issue causing considerable unease is the direction of the courts to allow access to either parent where parents are separated and children stay with either parent. In some cases this may mean the child is sent to stay with the person who has harmed them. The other parent then has to deal with the unstable behavior when the child returns to their care. This has occurred because it is deemed that both parents should have access to their child/children.

### 3.

#### **REMOVAL OF CHILDREN AT BIRTH**

Mother's who have their children removed at birth by Child Protection do not have ongoing follow up support to deal with this action and the grief and loss issues that would accompany such an action.

#### **ASSESSMENTS PRIOR TO COMMENCING SCHOOL**

The new system has overlooked a reporting mechanism for developmental delays.

There has been an increase in children requiring assessment prior to school and others have needed speech therapy intervention.

Lack of GP services in some areas has meant that children have missed out on 3 year old medical assessments which also examines development and immunisation records. Vision and hearing can also be overlooked when children are not presented for these important assessments.

Behavioural issues in children cannot be addressed appropriately where parents are unwilling to gain valuable parenting skills and apply them on a daily basis. Poverty, neglect and abuse of children continue to exist. Schools are providing meals and clothing for some children.

Pay as You Go power has increased and some parents are not bathing their children as they regularly run out of hot water. Money often goes on drugs and alcohol and this means no food for the children. Children can be malnourished and some have vitamin D deficiencies. One child had rotten teeth down to the gum line requiring dental surgery. This meant speech development was also delayed.

#### **REPORTING OF INCIDENTS**

The aggression and violence in some neighborhoods has meant that there are many people who are afraid to report these incidents for fear of repercussion. Others are so disappointed in a system that doesn't take them seriously when they report these incidents that they have given up.

#### **BROKERAGE**

Funds to address needs of families are sadly lacking with funds having been overspent in one area which means that much needed services cannot be provided.

#### **COUNSELLING SERVICES**

There are not enough counsellors, psychologists and behavioural therapists available to meet the needs of the increasing number of children requiring help in these areas. Domestic Violence services have a considerable waiting list which does not help families who are struggling in this area.

4.

### **PARENTING SKILLS TRAINING**

A lot of parents request one on one instruction with regard to parenting skills as they feel intimidated when attending group sessions.

Others have a difficulty as they are known to some group attendees and prefer not to mix with them because of a past history or connection with an ex partner.

### **POLICE SUPPORT**

Police are also frustrated by the lack of response to child protection issues. On one occasion child protection workers instructed an IFSS worker to call the police and when they have arrived they stated it was not a police matter and why weren't child protection dealing with it as the family was known to them ?

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Minister responsible for this portfolio tells us all is well. From a worker point of view that is not the case and the system is failing the very people it was set up to help.

Families need to be considered on a holistic basis including generational patterns ie. long term unemployment, literacy and numeracy, budgeting, parenting skills, physical and mental health, drug and alcohol abuse, public housing and appropriate support for children requiring foster care.

Kinship care has been used far too loosely which in some circumstances has led to far more complex issues including some children entering the youth justice system as a result of these placements.

Schools should not be placed in a position of being the watchdog for a service that already exists to protect children.

By its very name it is there to protect children however it is failing dismally because it doesn't circulate out in the community where it needs to be visible on a daily basis. It needs to be a 24 hour service especially at weekends when binge drinking is rife and children tend to go hungry because the money has run out.

Two workers in every home would increase the ability to get both children and parents relating well to one another and would also enable double the effort that a single worker can provide. If in the event after a concerted effort the family has not responded to the support given the children should be removed.

Child protection workers should also be encouraged to show respect to the professional workers who have taken on the role of caring for these families at a much reduced monetary award in comparison to their award.

## 5.

Many are nurses, teachers and others who have chosen this field of work because of their dedication and compassion for children and families. The work is done under difficult circumstances and without the acknowledgement by government with regard to the valuable asset these workers are. Child protection is a concern that is the responsibility of each and everyone of us.

It is a team effort and while many agencies work well together there seems to be a division between these agencies and child protection. Child Protection workers appear reluctant to work as part of the bigger team. There are many child protection workers who have been in these positions for many years from observations it appears to be 'just a job' and the dedication and zeal for obtaining positive outcomes seems to be lacking. An improved working relationship by all concerned with the care of children is imperative. Speaking with former child protection workers one hears the frustration and sees the anger of not being able to address the needs of the families because of a bureaucratic inability to accept that this is an area in need of change in the interest of the children it is meant to protect.