

12th November 2010

Shane Donnelly
Secretary
House of Assembly
Parliament House
HOBART 7000

Dear Shane

Thank you for the invitation to provide a submission to the Select Committee on Child Protection due to the closing date for the receipt of submissions short timeframe my response is limited to some key dot points however I hope this will assist in the review process.

Question A & B

As noted in the National Framework for Protecting Australian Children and the National Early Years Strategy, early intervention is a really important strategy in reducing the rate of abuse and reducing intergenerational abuse. There are many examples of community projects and approaches that focus on building capacity in families, communities and services as well as a number of government initiatives that are currently being implemented. Council works collaboratively with government, non government agencies, local groups and the community on a range of strategies, projects and approaches to meet the needs of young people in Clarence some examples of these are;

- Child and Family Centres – provides opportunities for families to have better access to early childhood support and services, with the central focus being on children's health/well being. Being involved in the Local Enabling Group for the Clarence Plains C&FC has shown the vital importance in engaging the community in all aspects of shaping the centre to ensure that it is meaningful, relevant and meets the needs of the community. Issues of long term sustainability and resourcing are all so important considerations.
- Facing Up To IT – Playing Our Part (FUTI-POP) challenging family violence and safe kids in Clarence Plains project is a good example of the a community working together in tackling sensitive community issues by encouraging everyone to play a role in creating a safer community.

More emphasis is needed in supporting/better resourcing community projects and approaches that focus on raising awareness of the importance of everyone playing a role (working together) in creating a safer community.

Question B

The establishment of the Community Gateway Service has provided another point of entry to support children and families without reference to the child protection system. This offers an opportunity to engage with families before issues/difficulties escalate.

- When families have agreed to be referred to Gateway services the response time in contacting/visiting families is often crucial to the outcomes. With this in mind adequate

staff resourcing needs to be taken into consideration to ensure there is the capacity to engage with families in a very short time frame once referrals have been made.

- Furthermore the involvement of this service is dependent on the family agreement to engage. In some cases if no agreement is reached the family situation can very quickly escalate and other interventions may often be required
- Many of the children, young people and families that come to the attention of the Family Support and Child Protection Service present with multiple and complex needs often requiring effective and coordinated case management. In our experience staff is dedicated and skilled however the overall capacity of staff to respond to reports through the DHHS Family Support & Child Protection Services is often stretched (depending on caseloads).
- Increasing placement options for children once in-care and improving support to carers is vital to ensure young people have better access to placements when needed.

Question C

Improving information sharing and where possible to remove barriers to information sharing i.e. Information sharing currently on the Interagency Support Teams is limited to government agencies due to legislative requirements/protocols. Often the young people referred to the IAT's are also being supported by a range of non-government services, these services have often established strong long-term relationships with the family/YP and play an important role in supporting strategies and providing social support. These services are not represented on the IST's and although there are mechanisms for these services to have input, it is limited. A review of this legislation to explore ways mechanisms that information can be shared in a safe way and in the best interests of the child would be beneficial.

Question D

Through our service we are seeing a significant increase of young people and families that are experiencing difficulties or are affected by mental health, alcohol & drug misuse, relationship issues, self harm, poverty and other issues. These issues impact heavily on young people's and families health and well being, and can be a contributing factor to child abuse and neglect.

Youth services provide a range of skill based learning, recreation and social support programs, access to outreach services, information and referral advice. In the council youth plan, young people & community identified health and wellbeing as an important focus and identified a number of strategies and actions to improving access to health and support services for young people in Clarence and to providing a safe and inclusive city. Council is working with DHHS, other services, community groups and young people on a number of strategies and actions to develop and implement appropriate approaches and models to help increase better outcomes.

I'm sorry that this submission is only a brief, unfortunately my current workload and the submission timeframe has limited my response. However, I would like to recommend that the YAP (Youth Actions Priority) regional group would be an effective forum to approach for input into this process. This forum is facilitated by Mark Joseph Youth Development Officer, Hobart City Council, and a range of state government, local government and non government youth service agencies attend to discuss and action identified priority youth issues and concerns.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you need clarification on any of the points raised or further information

Yours sincerely

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