



**Centre for Excellence
in Child and Family Welfare Inc.**

Media release

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Call for more young voices as Inquiry visits Bendigo

The peak body for child and family services in Victoria is calling for more young people with past experience of State care to make their voices heard when Bendigo hosts the third regional public sitting of the Baillieu Government's Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry (PVVCI) tomorrow, Wednesday 1 June.

The public sitting will convene at the Discovery Science and Technology Centre (next to station) from 9.30am. Verbal submissions will be heard by Chair and former Supreme Court of Victoria Judge, Philip Cummins, Professor Dorothy Scott, and Mr Bill Scales.

Dr Lynette Buoy, chief executive of the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, said the regional sittings had heard many valuable submissions. However, so far there had been none from young people who have left State care and no doubt have useful views to offer on how the system works and how it could be improved to better meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people coming into or currently in care.

"Hearing from young people was an express aim of this Inquiry from the outset. The Panel is visiting residential care units and holding focus groups for young people engaged through the CREATE Foundation. But the value of hearing in a public forum from young people not engaged in this manner, who have left care and are now living in the community, will further expand our understanding of current systemic issues.

The Inquiry's recommendations should take the long view of the prospects of these young people, and how the care system can prepare them for an independent life comparable to that available to their peers who have not experienced State care," Dr Buoy said.

While the voice of young people is critical in this Inquiry, the Centre is also supporting those among its nearly 100 member organisations who have made written submissions or intend to present at the public sittings. Centre member and local Bendigo agency, St Luke's Anglicare, will be among those to present on Wednesday.

"St Luke's submission focuses on the need for increased funding for longer and more intensive support of vulnerable families, and improved engagement of families in case-planning processes," said Mr John Bonnice, General Manager, Child, Youth and Family Services, St Luke's, today.

Mr Bonnice also identified the need to expand educational opportunities, vocational and employment programs, and therapeutic care models across home-based and residential

care programs. He said more local coordination and planning of support to vulnerable families should include a range of available support services, as well as child protection.

CARE With Me, a foster care support program for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) children and young people will also present on Wednesday.

“With more and more children and young people from Muslim backgrounds requiring out of home care, including those entering the foster care system and those who are unaccompanied minors being released from refugee detention centres into community care – mostly from Afghanistan and Iraq – more Muslim carers are desperately needed,” said CARE With Me President, Mohamed Elmasri today.

“We need to ensure that our carers and case workers can provide greater cultural and religious engagement with their communities. We must learn from past lessons and work harder to prevent the risk of harm we have witnessed when we cut off vulnerable children and young people from their communities and cause identity issues,” Mr Elmasri said.

Set to report to Parliament in November, the Inquiry was announced by the Premier on 31 January. It will: “investigate systemic problems in Victoria’s child protection system and make recommendations to strengthen and improve the protection and support of vulnerable young Victorians”, according to the official Inquiry website, www.childprotectioninquiry.vic.gov.au

The Centre for Excellence Inquiry website for the community sector is at www.theiroutcomesmatter.org . Related Twitter posts are hashtagged #pvvci.

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