

Media release
Thursday 20 May 2010

Case plans essential for vulnerable children

Media statements by the Community Services Minister, Lisa Neville, that best interests case plan targets are being met only 20 per cent of the time are an admission the Government is not meeting the needs of vulnerable children, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare said today.

“We are hearing the same excuses we heard twelve months ago, and following the Ombudsman’s report on child protection last November. If staffing is still the issue, we need to look at different ways to ensure that case planning happens in the time required by the legislation,” the Centre’s chief executive, Dr Lynette Buoy, said today.

Dr Buoy said it was concerning that the Minister could still not report on the number of case plans delivered on time compared to the number required to be delivered. The stark contrast in what the Minister and the Departmental Secretary, Gill Callister, saw as statutory obligations cast uncertainty over planning for vulnerable children on Court orders, Dr Buoy said.

“Regardless of the validity of the legal advice the Minister has received about the legal requirements, technical interpretations of the law do nothing to lessen the moral obligation of the Government to ensure that children are allocated case workers, and that robust, best interests case plans are in place as soon as possible,” Dr Buoy said.

Section 167 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2007*, places a clear obligation on the Secretary of the Department of Human Services to prepare a case plan within six weeks of a Court order, and to give that plan to the child and his or her parent within 14 days of its preparation.

“Either there’s a case plan or there isn’t. Confusion about ‘draft’ plans not mentioned in the legislation requires urgent clarification, including how many plans have been made available to children and their parents within the time required,” Dr Buoy said.

The Centre has consistently advocated to Government that early intervention and preventive approaches through better resourced family services would help stem the tide of child protection notifications and decrease the pressure on an over-stretched child protection workforce.

For media enquiries:

Dr Lynette Buoy, Chief Executive Officer
Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare
Phone 0407 702 975