

Media release
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State's parenting in question again

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare has welcomed the release of the Ombudsman's investigation into Out of Home Care. Like his November 2009 report into child protection, this report reveals disturbing and saddening cases of child abuse and neglect.

Centre chief executive Dr Lynette Buoy said while these cases do not represent the experience of most children in Out of Home Care, they indicate the complexity of a system working with Victoria's most vulnerable children.

"These cases are as shocking and alarming for the sector as they are for the public, she said.

Dr Buoy was concerned that perceptions of foster carers may suffer through this report, and cautioned that the safety concerns raised do not apply to all carers.

"Foster carers play a critical role and the majority of them do fabulous work and need to be supported to do what they do best," she said.

Services that wrap around the child and their carer, giving both access to therapeutic care is where we need to be heading.

"The government response to this investigation also provides us with much to be concerned about," Dr Buoy said.

The educational expenses allowance, while a new injection to the system, will fall a long way short of addressing the critical educational needs of vulnerable children, who are coping with issues beyond financial hardship.

"Investment in education needs to target the poor educational outcomes which dominate the experience of a child in care. Ongoing assessments of their needs must begin as soon as they enter care and remain a significant developmental focus.

"Funds for uniforms and books only meet the financial disadvantages. Evidence tells us that children in the Out of Home Care system deal with multiple disadvantages,



and require significant support to ensure the outcomes they achieve meet all acceptable national benchmarks."

"The Centre notes that extension in support for young people leaving care as a welcome inclusion, and we hope that in the fine print, this extends to tertiary education."

Dr Buoy said the Minister had indicated priority access to mental health services for children in care, but there was no additional funding for this move.

"Priority for mental health services doesn't equal access."

Finally, Dr Buoy said the Ombudsman's report was narrowly focused on compliance, statistics and scrutiny, rather than on the best interests of the child.

"We support compliance that serves the best interest of children, but heavier regulation does not always lead to better outcomes for children," Dr Buoy said.

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