

## FACT SHEET

### Family and Children's Services – Reforms and new Initiatives

In December 2003 the NT Government announced a five year plan to reform the Child Protection System in the NT that including substantial new investment.

The plan included additional growth funding for the Family and Children's Services Program from 1 January 2004, and a commitment to review and replace the legislation governing child protection, the *Community Welfare Act 1983*.

In August 2007, 'Closing the Gap of Indigenous Disadvantage' as part of the Northern Territory Government response to the *Little Children are Sacred* report by the Anderson-Wild Board of Inquiry into the Sexual Abuse of Indigenous Children, committed further funding to continue the growth and reform of child protection and related services.

### New Legislation

The new ***Care and Protection of Children Act 2007*** was passed by the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly on 28 November and will be implemented in stages during 2008.

The new Act was the result of extensive consultation over several years with Government departments, statutory authorities, non-government agencies, communities, organisations and a number of individuals throughout the NT, and independent review by a national child reaction expert. The Act received bi-partisan support and a commitment by both the Government and Opposition to review again 12 months after operation to make any modifications that become apparent once the Act is operating.

The Act maintains universal mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect, provides for more contemporary and flexible responses to working with families at risk, and introduces a number of new features:

- A Children's Commissioner
- Criminal History Screening for Child Related Employment
- A Child Death Review and Prevention Committee
- Extension of support to young people leaving care up to the age of 25
- Expansion of the licensing requirements for children's care and development services.

## New Services and activities since 2004

- Creation of an additional 71 new Child Protection and Care Worker positions within the FACS program across the NT, including 16 new Aboriginal specific positions.
- Establishment of a 24 Hour central intake team to take calls about child abuse and neglect and do the initial screening and risk assessment on those matters. This included the employment of professional after hours workers for the first time.
- A new Joint Child Abuse Taskforce with the NT Police. The Taskforce is co-located with the 24 Hour Intake Unit and is staffed by specially trained FACS and Police officers who investigate the most serious cases of child abuse.
- A new Peace at Home Unit in Katherine. This unit is a another joint initiative between FACS and the Police with a specific focus on working with families where family violence is evident.
- A new intensive family support service in Darwin, *Homestrength*. This service develops individually tailored plans to support families whose children are at high risk of being removed as a result of abuse, neglect or other serious family problems.
- A new family support service in Tenant Creek and a child safety service in Maningrida.
- A specific Indigenous family support program in Alice Springs, *Safe Families*. This program seeks to unite Indigenous children in care with their kinship group and provide family support to prevent re-entry into care.
- Annual CPI increases to the foster care payment rates, and two one off increases in the base payment rate: 8% in January 2004 and 8% in July 2007.
- A new Specialist Care Program to find and intensively support specialist carers for children and young people with challenging behaviours who are unable to be successfully placed in traditional foster care placements.
- A new Youth Team in Alice Springs to work with young people engaging in substance abuse and who are also lacking adequate care. This team now case manages 30 young people.
- Increased funding to NAPCAN NT (National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect) to operate a small grants program for communities and community groups to run child friendly and child safe activities around Child Protection Week. Approximately 30 projects and activities are funded each year in remote, regional and urban areas through this scheme.
- Funding for the NT Foster Carers Association to operate as an advocacy and support organisation for carers.
- Funded a Clinical Supervision program for FACS Team Leaders, conducted core training programs for all FACS staff and NGO's, and an annual Aboriginal Staff Forum for workers in the FACS program to receive specific training and development.

## Closing the Gap Initiatives

- Recruit an additional 10 child protection and family support workers at a cost of \$6.8M
- Provide a Residential Care Unit for young people at risk and establish a specialist therapeutic services team, at a cost of \$10.2M
- Provide additional care and case management for children in care at a cost of \$8.8M
- Establish a network of Aboriginal Child protection and Care Services, at a cost of \$10.15M

This network will:

- Operate in partnership with Family and Children's Services (FACS) in responding to child abuse and neglect
- Provide advice on investigating child abuse and neglect and on caring for children in ways that respect cultural authority
- Create and expand services in Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs
- Extend the Sexual Assault Referral Centres, to provide best practice crisis support to victims of sexual abuse at a cost of \$6.3M

This will include:

- Expanding the Darwin, Alice Springs and Tennant Creek Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARC)
- Establishing a SARC in Katherine
- Providing 12 additional counsellors, including some Aboriginal sexual assault workers
- Coordinating integrated responses to counselling, medical intervention and immediate therapy
- Providing ongoing advice and support to Family and Children's Services, health centres and police
- Providing community education and professional consultation services
- Expand the Child Abuse Taskforce, including an additional 23 FACS staff, 24 police and specialist child interviewers and to investigate the most serious and complex cases of child abuse, at a cost of \$29.04M
- Recruit 10 additional student counsellors to teach protective behaviour to Indigenous children and train school staff in mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse at a cost of \$5.23M

## Initiatives under Partnership funding with the Australian Government

- \$1.3M has been allocated to set up a team of Community-based Aboriginal Family and Community Workers, with a coordinator in the Top End and another in the Centre. A project officer has been employed to develop and implement this new service.
- \$1.7M has been allocated to set up a Mobile Child Protection team, who can deploy staff to areas in the Territory with greatest needs. Recruitment of team members has commenced.
- \$3.45M has been committed as capital to build new safe houses in remote communities.
  - Many will be built from Royal Wolf containers, the same containers being used for the new remote police stations.
  - The location for the safe houses is still being determined, taking into consideration both community need in terms of local violence incidents, and also the capacity and willingness of the community to manage a safe house.
- \$1M has been allocated to cover operational costs for the safe houses in 2007/08.