

Children deserve more than protection alone

Media Release CAFWAA (Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia)

Child Welfare agencies across Australia are concerned about the unacceptably high numbers of children coming to the attention of Child Protection authorities. Government figures for 2006-2007 show that over 300,000 children were notified to the State and Territory Child Protection authorities for suspected child abuse and neglect.

The Chair of the national peak body for child and family welfare providers CAFWAA, Lisa Hillan said “CAFWAA and its members are calling for a serious investment in reducing the shocking numbers of children and families coming into contact with the child protection system. We have failed to provide an adequate system that will stem the demand for placements in out of home care”.

From 2002 to 2006, all major indicators in child welfare point to a significant decline in child safety and wellbeing in this country, involving a 38% increase in substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect and a 35% rise in the number of Australian children and young people living away from their homes as a result.

Children’s protection and well -being cannot be solved by our State and Territory child protection authorities alone. CAFWAA believes that a concerted effort is needed from all levels of government including our health and education authorities to meet the needs of Australia’s children and their families to live free from harm.

CAFWAA urges the Federal Government to extend their efforts at addressing the child protection crisis through a significant investment in early intervention strategies. “We must support vulnerable families earlier if we are serious about preventing abuse of a greater number of Australian children” Ms Hillan said. “This must start with a major new investment in family support services”.

Experts in Child Welfare believe if the current trend of notifications of child abuse and investigations is maintained, one in five Australian families will come into contact with a statutory child protection authority. This is no longer **just** a problem for child welfare organisations but one that every Australian should be concerned about.

Ms Hillan states that “our current approach to Child



The Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia (CAFWAA) is the national peak body representing community service organisations working with vulnerable children, young people and families, including those experiencing neglect and abuse and those living in an Out of Home Care environment.

Protection in Australia is unsustainable. But worse still, it is not working. We must be able to offer real hope and practical services that strengthen families and these are sadly lacking for many children and families in need of help". CAFWAA is calling for a national approach that is backed by a renewed commitment on the part of the Federal Government to additional resources to turn this crisis around.

CAFWAA sees the development of local responses, incorporating the needs of children within a family seeking services such as mental health, drug and alcohol and domestic and family violence as imperative to turning around our current Child Protection crisis.

Ms Hillan reiterated that "CAFWAA believes that our future as a nation depends upon a response that goes beyond reactive responses to child abuse to one that strengthens families and communities. Our responses have to provide nurturing and consistent care for children."