

Response to

Australia's Children: Safe and Well

Author: Father Chris Riley, CEO & Founder

Youth Off The Streets



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Youth Off The Streets
PO Box 2065
ALEXANDRIA NSW 2015
Ph: 02 8332 5000
Fax: 02 8332 5050
Email: inam@youthoffthestreets.com.au

Introduction

Our kids are far from safe and well. While we wring our hands and act shocked as the media highlights abuse of children, we forget just as quickly.

We as a Nation do not take the protection of children and youth seriously. Sure, when we read graphic headlines, we get shocked and angry – but that subsides as new headlines occupy our attention.

In almost one week of news, we have once again read of incredible headlines:

“Worldwide Web of exploitation.

40 arrested – the abuse of children is being fuelled by a hierarchical online paedophile networks which reward those who supply their own fresh images of child exploitation with access to even more material.” *Sydney Morning Herald, 6/6/08.*

Note: most of these men will be given light or no gaol sentences and photographs of children show real abuse of children – they are not acting!

“SQUALOR, NEGLECT IN THE NATION’S CAPITAL.

Three boys and a girl were taken away after being found alone at a house littered with rubbish, dog bones and discarded toys in Canberra.” *Daily Telegraph, 26/6/08.*

‘FOURTEEN KIDS LEFT TO STARVE – IN AUSTRALIA.

Fourteen malnourished children have been hospitalised and a mother has been charged after up to 21 neglected children were found crammed into one suburban house.” *The Daily Telegraph, 24/6/08.*

Note: the article adds a note of surprise that there could be starving kids in Australia. We have some kids living in greater poverty than kids in third world countries. Often our kids are also physically and sexually abused.

‘TRIPLE MURDER BY VIOLENT DAD.

The bodies of Jack, 7, Maddie, 5, and 18-month-old Bon Bell were yesterday found in a car alongside the body of their father, Greg Bell.

Relatives told horror stories yesterday of Bell’s wife especially seeking help from neighbours over the past two years as the beatings got more violent.” *The Daily Telegraph, 28/6/08.*

Look at the figures that articulate how we treat our young people:

- Two in five young people will be contacted by an internet predator.
- One in four girls will be sexually assaulted.
- One in sever boys will be sexually assault.
- In the last 12 months 123 kids died in NSW alone:
 - 63 because of parental substance abuse,
 - 49 because of parental mental health problems,
 - 85 because of domestic violence,

- 9 because of neglect.
- 73 were under the age of 12 months.
- 25 were aboriginal – 20% of all reviewable deaths.
- 2005-2006 DoCS Helpline received over 241,000 reports – up 11.4% on the previous year and 51% increase over 5 years.
- There are 660 notifications a day in NSW and this is indicative of other states.
- Pedophilia has reached epidemic proportions with some experts calling it Australia's biggest health crisis – yet it is a crisis that is rarely spoken about. Statistics shows 2277 attacks by pedophiles were reported to NSW police last year.

Last year the average gaol sentence given to 120 pedophiles was less than three years, while 48 were let off without a gaol sentence.

And now some more damning figures for how we care for our kids:

- In any given week, approximately 1 in 10 (or 168,000) 12 to 17 year olds reported binge drinking/drinking to harmful levels.
- In any given week 1 in 10 (or 31, 325) 15 years old reported binge drinking.
- At least 451,620 children live in a household where they are at risk of exposure to binge drinking by one adult.
- 78,000 children live in a household where there is at least one daily cannabis user.
- 27,000 children live in a household where an adult is using methamphetamines monthly.

(ANCD recent report – 25/2/08).

- Estimates suggest that half of the population over the age of 14 years drink alcohol.
- The most popular beverage types of 14-24 year olds are bottled spirits, liqueurs and pre-mixes in cans and bottles, and regular strength beer for males. Older females aged 21-24 also preferred bottled wine. For 12-17 year olds, the most important popular types of drinks for both sexes were pre-mixed drinks in a can, bottled spirits.
- Between 2000 and 2004 there has been a three and a half fold increase in preference of young female risky drinkers aged 15-17.
- By 18 years of age, approximately 50% of both males and females are risky drinkers. But the majority (67%) of young risky drinkers classify themselves as 'social drinkers.'
- Young people are particularly vulnerable to acute harms arising from intoxication, including health, legal and social problems and 264 young people aged 15-24 die each year as a result of risky alcohol consumption.

- Alcohol is a major contributor to preventable illness and death, and is responsible for over 3,100 deaths and 72,000 hospitalisations per year.
- In general, young adolescents (12-15 years old) do not initially enjoy the taste of alcohol, describing it as disgusting and burning the throat.
- 27% of 15-16 year old Australians believe that RTD advertisements are targeted at 'people my age' and almost 50% of 19-21 years olds believe that RTD advertising is aimed at 'people younger or much younger than me.'

We must take responsibility for our young.

1. Stronger Prevention Focus

- Sexual assault needs to be tackled as one of the worst public health problems facing Australia. These are our most vulnerable and we will be judged as a society by how we take care of our most vulnerable.
- 95% of abuse to children is done by people who are well known to the young person and their family, for example; a father, grandfather, teacher or cousin. Those looking after children need to be given the tools so that they may know how to protect their children, they may learn to be their children's 'gatekeeper.' There are well documented programs that could be used to educate and alert parents. When kids present to welfare agencies, they have already been abused.
- While targeting carers of young people with prevention strategies, we need to urgently also target our young people themselves. This can be achieved by developing a National Child Protection and Safety curriculum that would bridge all levels of schooling. This program must emphasise reality to our young people so that they may recognise potential sexual abuse before it occurs. The program must acknowledge that 95% of people who abuse children are known to them; rather than the stereotypical dirty old man in the trench coat who preys on children. Stranger Danger has not protected children from sexual abuse because the perpetrators are more likely to be known to the child. Professor Freda Briggs has proved the success of teaching young people aged 11-14 to protect themselves. Her research completed for New Zealand Police and the Ministry for Education found that a number of young people had utilised what they had been taught to both protect themselves and help siblings and friends.
- Youth Off The Streets have been approached by a community in Western Sydney to provide outreach services to their youth. One in 14 of the young people in this community are addicted to the drug 'ice.' Services such as our Outreach Service for Youth should be available to all disadvantaged communities.
- In another community we have been asked to help deal with youth violence. One politician rang me, distraught, that a thirteen year old boy had been attacked by a group of young people who stole his mobile phone. A 12 year old stabbed him. This type of violence is happening on a daily basis. Kids repeat behaviours that are modelled to them. Where kids are beaten up in the home by those who are supposed to love them, they will simply repeat the behaviour. Young people need to be educated about the support services available to sufferers of Domestic Violence. They need to be educated that domestic violence is not appropriate behaviour in any family.

The abuse, neglect and abandonment that we read about in our communities are what consign the human spirit to darkness.

When we see troubled kids we begin the journey to understand the quality of their early relationships, the psychological condition of their inner life, and the development of their spirit. At the heart of the matter is whether a young child is connected rather than abandoned, accepted rather than rejected and nurtured, rather than neglected and abused.

The culture of our government, our legal system and all services operating with our young people must be changed so that they may operate with the understanding that:

- The worth of a young person is greater than their worst act.
- Bad youth are elements of a system. The majority of their unsanctioned behaviour is linked to preventable economic, social, familiar, educational, and legal issues.
- Pathologising, criminalising, dehumanizing and demonising troubled youth have proven ineffective as a strategy for provoking lasting positive changes.
- A male positive attitude to troubled boys utilizes compassion, responsibility, fierce challenge, cultural literacy and social inclusion to create therapeutic alliances that can effectively provoke positive change.
- Adults are responsible for the majority of social ills now ascribed to young people. Ignorance not boys is our common enemy.

Our young people are in trouble and we do nothing at our own peril.

We are living in an unprecedented social experiment. Never have so many lived so far from extended family or outside of traditional communities, where adults served as collective parents for all neighborhoods young people. Never have so many marriages ended in divorce or divided families, or so many elderly been relegated to unfamiliar surroundings. These developments have reduced our social capital – the relationships that bind people together and create a sense of community. Consequences include ways to deal with our profound loss of social connectedness.

Action required:

- Particularly in our troubled communities, we need to provide infrastructure that is youth friendly. Youth Centers need to be built to reduce youth boredom, to provide a place of safety for young people and to give them a sense of hope.
- Development of mentoring programs should engage people across the country to reconnect young people to their communities.
- Communities should be encouraged to come together to build 'villages' to raise their children and to bring unity where there is divisiveness and apathy.

2. Better collaboration between services

When dealing with abuse, neglect and deaths of children (420 in the past 4 years) we need to focus on many societal pressures that impact on this abuse. While there is a great outcry against DoCS when a tragedy happens, **the focus should be on the general exploitation of our young people and the responsibility of Every Adult to CARE for Every Child.**

Throughout history it was agreed that children should be kept out of politics, economy/work and sexualisation. In this country we have broken with these accepted traditions, often in a pursuit of money and leaving our kids vulnerable.

Marketing forces need to be dealt with so that we can make this a safer country for young people to live in.

Advertising targeting our kids: sexualizing our kids.

- A major retailer has come under fire for selling a line of T-shirts targeting school age children with the following slogans emblazoned across them such as “Mr. Pimp,” “Mr. Loser,” “Mr. Asshole,” “Miss Wasted,” “Mr. Drunk,” “Miss Floozy,” and line is entitled “Little Losers.”

If the public is really serious about protecting our children, then there should be a major outcry against this type of marketing. It aligns young people with the sex-trade (pimp, floozy), with abuse of alcohol and drugs (Wasted, Drunk) and with the most insidious attack that they are ‘losers.’

Dr. Michael Carr-Gregg stated in relation to these items, “What we are doing is normalising and glamourising language that is not appropriate.”

- Fashion of young people mimic adult fashions, even to the point where 3 year olds can now get padded bras to wear. Childhood should be a time of play and adventure, not watching out for someone to attack them because they are perceived to be dressed provocatively.
- All types of advertisements for all types of things are exploitive of young people. As you drive around Sydney at the moment, you may have seen an advertisement for the lemonade product “Sprite” with the slogan: “Be sexy drink sprite” with the image of green biki clad young girl holding the bottle down near her vagina (as though to insert).

Drugs and Alcohol:

There is no doubt that sexual and physical assault of children revolves around alcohol use/abuse. While it is thought that most child abusers are ‘dirty old men clad in raincoats,’ this is simply not the case. In fact a large percentage of sexual assaults are committed by adolescents.

Rogue traders of the alcohol industry target young people, although they deny it. Binge drinking is at epidemic proportions. The age of young people experiencing alcohol has dropped to 12. A fifth of young people aged between 16-25 drink to intoxication most times that they drink and 42% of young drinkers report memory loss after drinking.

The alcohol industry cannot be relied on to monitor inappropriate advertising. One of the guidelines of ABAC code indicates that alcohol advertising should not be linked with sexual advantage. A recent James Boag’s beer commercial featured a bikini clad woman climbing up on a Mercedes Benz’s bonnet to drink beer after its male

driver took her dress off via the car's electric aerial. However, the complaint against the Boag's commercial was rejected by the industry run Advertising Standard's Bureau (ASB). ASB chief executive, Fiona Jolly defended the decisions of the authority despite the study accusing the board of not doing 'an adequate job.' Ms. Jolly said the advertisements were based on "prevailing community attitudes and standards rather than those of any particular individual or group."

Pick up any of the magazines targeting young people and we will see more marketing around the sexualisation of our young people and the sexual rewards being attached to alcohol use eg. *Zoo Magazine* January, 2008 page 22 which reads, "The Wright Stuff: it's not a mirage – just our top sand-loving stunner scorching it up in the Seppo desert" topless young females in suggestive positions and 'the winner' holding a bottle of beer.

Recommendations:

- We need to acknowledge that some alcohol companies target kids with their marketing campaigns and we as a society should ensure the milieu our children live in is cleaned up.
- We need Governments to acknowledge the damage alcohol does to young people and the part it plays in physical and sexual violence.
- Governments should **ban** products such as:
 - BOMB: its packaging reads: Herbal Energy Shot: The Bomb – contains caffeine (Tornado Shot). 20% alcohol content.
 - Cowboy: its packaging reads Original cowboy cream, smooth, "Mini udder" 15% alcohol/vol. Clearly targeting kids and even referring to 'breast feeding' through its milk base.
 - Fairy bomb: genuine green fairy Absinth Energy Drink 8.2% alcohol/vol.
 - Alco-pops eg. Vodka Cruiser: its packaging reads "Passionfruit Drink" (large lettering) then smaller "Genuine double distilled vodka. 5% alcohol/vol. Many studies maintained that this product is attractively coloured to catch the attention of young people and its masks the alcohol taste by making it taste like a soft drink.
 - Marketing of alcohol products during sporting events should be banned before 9 p.m It is a serious anomaly that all advertising of alcohol on television must be after 9 p.m. except when a sporting event is involved.

3. Improving responses for children in care and young people leaving care.

The case of 9 year-old Shella who starved to death recently highlighted some areas that need addressing:

It is our experience that the DoCS *Helpline* is effective. Where to from the Helpline is where things fall down.

The help line forwards the notification to the local office. What happens here is crucial and this is where things often break down.

- Staffing is a real issue. In the case of Shella, in her area there were 68 staff vacancies, 39 of them were caseworkers. Staffing is at crisis right across the sector. DoCS pays much higher wages than not for

profit and is able to recruit more effectively. With the low unemployment rates, it is impossible to fill positions.

- The local office receives the computer report from the Helpline and decisions are often made from computer material.
- Initial follow up, and at times, the only follow up, is a phone call to the household where the kids have been notified at risk.
- Before the local office will take on a new case, they have to have re-allocated one of the present cases being dealt with.
- If a case is not followed up by the local office, it is closed and lost to the system.
- A dual case management system has been set up. Some would say to cover their backs; I would agree that the decisions the department takes are grave and need consultation.
- When concerned people ring or contact DoCS, they are simply told that the case is being assessed.
- From a theoretical point of view, DoCS believe that they should find the 'strengths' of family and try to rebuild. There is some fear that in the future there will be accusations of a new 'stolen generation' claim from whatever community kids are taken from.
- The bunker mentality and the accountability of the Minister often forces DoCS to go into damage control.

Recommendations:

- I call on every adult to take responsibility for every child. In this case, this was exemplified as a neighbour had made notifications to DoCS and even as the family was about to move she took down the removalist details and handed them to DoCS – no action was taken and this is a case where DoCS clearly got it wrong and should have acted. In other cases, such as the tragic deaths of the 18 month-old twins in QLD, neighbours said the children told them they were starving, while other neighbours admitted that they should have done something to help these kids, and yet they didn't take any action before it was too late.
- Certain media campaigns have demonstrated we can tap into the Australian psyche to change attitudes eg. Wearing seat belts, not driving intoxicated, smoking. We need to run ongoing campaigns highlighting that each child is the responsibility of every adult. Not only challenging people to be the 'eyes and ears' of our children, but also an educational package highlighting indicators of behaviour which 'red flag' abuse of children.

4. Improving Responses to Indigenous Children

All recommendations in the 6 points of this document will help to improve our response for the protection of Indigenous Children.

- In relation to the abuse of Aboriginal kids (the aboriginal community comprises 4% of the population and yet comprise 16% of the notifications). The draft template is not adhered to and often the people the notification goes to are members of the same family and the notification goes no further. This happened in our work where we notified kids were at risk, but no action was taken on the notification.

A further addition, is the need for our society to change its attitude towards Multiculturalism and Racism.

Racism, prejudice and discriminations is alive in our communities. It needs to be named so it can be healed.

Multiculturalism as a strategy to heal prejudice, simply hasn't worked.

With my view comes the understanding that we all have prejudices and biases within us that we need to challenge and change. Our prejudices can be built around race, religion, low IQ, high IQ, fat-skinny and one of the worst types of prejudices is displayed through bullying.

At the heart of my belief for healing our prejudices, whatever they may be is to ***embrace the oneness of humankind.***

The goal of the Institutes for Healing Racism are not satisfied with merely helping people of different skin colours to ***tolerate*** each other. They are primarily concerned with helping them learn to love one another truly and honestly.

When ***diversity/multiculturalism*** is emphasized there is a tendency to avoid probing the nature of racism and prejudice, considerable energy is expended in mastering political correctness. As a consequence, the treatment employed to produce racial harmony is at best superficial.

Facing reality is the first step to healing.

Prejudice, ignorance and racism can only be healed when we as human beings look into each other's eyes and acknowledge ***that we are all one family.***

- We are first human, then we are ethnic,
- There is only one race, the human race.
- The idea of race is man's most dangerous myth.

We must stop rejoicing in our differences and start focusing on our similarities.

5. Attracting & Retaining the Right Workforce

It is not only attracting & retaining the right workforce we need to look at. The people working to protect children need to be backed up by our Government's legislation and legal system so that they may work effectively.

While there are some staff members in DOCS who operate by creating fear, believing that they have power over everyone and everything, who adapt a 'seige mentality', who will not share information – every agency has these cowboys who resist new and productive cultures (including my own).

Most staff, are there for the right reasons; however, they burn out very quickly. We could blame management perhaps, but, I believe it is more about what they see.

The Daily Telegraph described a day in the life of a DoCS Officer on 16/11/07 which captures the pathos these workers endure.

He knocks on the front door of the house, with unmown grass and the haunted look. He takes a deep breath because something tells him he'll need it.

His instincts are right. The door opens and the stench assaults him, almost hurling him back. Inside he finds a four year old girl wandering aimlessly, hair filled with lice, clothes infested with fleas.

She can barely speak. Years of chronic neglect have left her with a vocabulary of few words and a body failing from a constant diet of fast food.

Faeces litters the floors. In the kitchen, rotting meat festers on a bench amid piles of unwashed dishes, other scraps of weeks old food, bongos and poisons.

The DoCS staff are condemned by everyone. The parents or so called carers of the kids are abusive and threatening. Some have weapons and threaten the DoCS staff that they will hurt them if they try to take their kids away.

If anything goes wrong, the public and the media are brutal in their assessment and the courts are often hostile and abusive towards them, calling them inept or incompetent and often impose orders that leave the Docs staff powerless.

We must work to guarantee that Government Legislation and the legal system work to support staff who are working to ensure the protection of our children. Many recent court outcomes and positions are baffling and give the wrong message to both offenders and young victims.

The recent Aurukun case demonstrates that lack of understanding that some magistrates have about the outcomes and long term effects of abuse of children. We must ensure that our young victims of abuse are supported when they go to the police and as their case proceeds through the court system.

I was outraged at the initial sentence given to the 13 men in Queensland who raped a 10 year old girl. The system drastically let that poor girl down. None of these men were sent to gaol and the juveniles involved were not given a criminal conviction. The magistrate suggested that this girl somehow lead the men on. How can this be the case? This is the most blatant indicator that our system is failing our children.

This girl is now 11, she is running out of control. Breaking all the rules, being violent, stealing cars. We left her there in that society to face her pack of attackers. We failed to provide the support this young girl deserved. I hope when she turns 16, we don't forget what we let happen to her in our failed responsibility and simply lock her up. We have murdered her soul. We must ensure that our courts and their punishments reflect the system of law that our public has given our government the responsibility to uphold.

Let's look at what happened in NSW courts over the past twelve months:

- In the past decade, 104 children have been murdered and almost all of their killers will be reintegrated back into the community. In spite, many not being rehabilitated.
- Paedophilia has reached epidemic proportions with some experts calling it Australia's biggest health crisis – yet it is rarely spoken about. Statistics shows 2277 attacks by pedophiles were reported to NSW police last year.
- Last year the average gaol sentence given to 120 pedophiles was less than three years, while 48 were let off without a gaol sentence.

Child protection advocate Dr. Freda Briggs is a renowned expert on the abuse of children. She recently made the following points:

- This abuse of children is underestimated with terrible consequences.
- She commented in relation to Lewthwaite being released and stated he is not as safe as authorities expected him to be.
- She states that when it reaches court, offenders are rewarded and given confidence by a legal system which makes it all about them. She has seen a paedophile claim a three-year-old girl asked to be assaulted because she reached up and touched his side.

The recent case of sex predator, Raymond Barry Cornwall exemplifies this.

He refused treatment and yet was let out. He was recaptured on a beach watching a group of young people.

What is needed:

The Premier, Morris Iemma has made some attempts to address this:

- The Premier of NSW, over the past twelve months has requested that victims of crime being treated with more respect and that children not be badgered by over zealous lawyers and barristers,
- He has also requested longer sentences be looked at.

Recommendations:

But we need to go further:

- Unless an offender has demonstrated beyond doubt that they will not reoffend, then they should not be released from gaol. They will reoffend and will affect numerous amounts of kids.
- Serious consideration should be given to indeterminate sentencing of people who abuse children. An offender should only be released if they can prove that they have participated in therapy and dealt with their issues.
- For repeated offenders, they should be given a life sentence – never to be released.
- Recently a group of 11 men were charged with having almost 800,000 images of child pornography. When this news broke, it received very little coverage. It was at the time of Andrew Johns opening up on his battle with mental issues and abuse of drugs. He is hardly public enemy number one and we should have highlighted these men who were caught with so many images. Child pornography is not a

victimless crime, it is real kids being abused and the demand for such material ensures the practice of child abuse continuing. Owners of such material must be given lengthy sentences that reflect their complicity in the production of the material.

- Our present legal system gives little consideration to the victims. In our present system the 'victim' is the State (the Prosecutor). Restorative justice takes a very different approach and gives power back to the victim. We need to look at the restorative justice process as a way of balancing the needs of the victim against the needs of the perpetrator.

6. Improving Child Protection Systems

Recommendations:

- We must unpack the concept of generating another 'stolen generation' for what it really is. The aboriginal stolen generation was not about removing kids from dangerous and abusive environments. Some of those kids needed to be removed from abusive homes and environments. The evil of the aboriginal stolen generation was that it was Government policy, through Legislation, to remove all half caste aboriginal kids and was an act of genocide. Their homes and environment were not assessed and kids were removed from good and caring families. No one would argue against kids being removed from abusive homes.
- Interagency guidelines are largely not followed and there is little cooperation between agencies. A lack of sharing of knowledge. A team approach with an open sharing of information needs to be followed. If all the individual pieces were put together, we would get a clear picture to underpin our action or inaction.
- When investigating the notifications, often the only people questioned are the parents or direct carers of the children. 'Family conferencing' needs to be utilised when investigating. Sometimes the grandmother has information that is relevant. Checking with the child's school, doctor and other interested parties need to be put in place to get the real picture.
- 'Border issues' (across state lines) are of great concern and a national approach needs to be taken. People can relocate states and lose all the history that may be accumulated from their home state.
- In relation to the abuse of Aboriginal kids (the aboriginal community comprises 4% of the population and yet comprise 16% of the notifications). The draft template is not adhered to and often the people the notification goes to are members of the same family and the notification goes no further. This happened in our work where we notified kids were at risk, but no action was taken on the notification.
- I would like to see a 'rapid response group' established. Where a group goes through every notification every day and actions the ones that seem to present a 'red flag.' This group would need resources that they can instantly move a young person to. One of the greatest drawbacks for DoCS staff is a lack of resources to interact immediately and this disadvantages them.

This may involve:

- If the feeling was strong enough, that child who is the centre of the notification is immediately removed from the household **while the investigation is going on**. Often death occurs before the investigation is actioned or while the investigation is occurring.

- From Helpline to local office to the 'rapid response team' and also directly from the Helpline directly to the 'rapid response team.'
- The 'rapid response team' would be contracted by DoCS and would work in close cooperation with DoCS. This shared responsibility takes the full onus off DoCS who are bearing the whole brunt of the blame for abuse.
- The purchase of a suitable accommodation unit would be essential E.g.; A hotel with full facilities to care for kids in crisis.
- By economy of scales this would not be an expensive operation as we are talking about millions and millions of dollars going into the present system.
- The team would need to be made up of experienced professional, psychologists, youth workers, social workers and police.
- The response would err on the side of caution to protect children; however, I would rather have 'egg on my face' than the death of a child on my conscience.
- It would need to comprise an Advisory Committee to work closely with it E.g.; People like Barbara Holborow, Rod Blackmore, Jock Crawford; experienced psychologists, doctors nurses.

We must work to prevent our system leaving children open to abuse through leniency awarded to their abusers. The shocking decision to grant the mother of Missy, bashed as a 10 month old baby and left with brain damage and a shunt in her stomach, unsupervised visits when Missy was 6 years old, only served to leave Missy open to abuse again.

The cases of Shellay, Missy and Dean are representative of many other cases. In order to protect our children, we must:

- Make an assessment of a family and ensure that neglectful and abusive individuals should not be responsible for the raising of children ever again. While re-establishing families is a good position for us to take; we must also make an assessment that some people should never have their children returned. This should not only apply to the present children who have been abused, but also for any unborn children those individuals may have.
- Foster families need to be sought, trained and supported so that there are places for children who are at risk to be placed safely. Foster families will only work if they are given 'wrap around' support services to help them. Some of the kids going into foster care are severely traumatized and present major behavioral problems. Often when things go wrong, the foster family is blamed and the child is taken away. In reality, these foster parents need support to deal with these troubled kids.
- Adoption: it is constantly stated that there are no kids to adopt in this country. This is true only because our fundamental premise is that all children belong with their natural parents. While this is the best option, it is not an option if the natural parents are abusive and neglectful. Kids removed from home need a security and need to know that there are people who will commit to them.

Care Courts:

I am aware that my good friend and great advocate for children, Barbara Holborow, has presented to the Inquiry.

Many years ago Barbara set up the Care Court that dealt with cases involving children who had been abused. Her passion and commitment went a long way to ensuring kids were kept safe. At that time, we had committed Children Court's magistrates such as Justice Rod Blackmore and Justice Jock Crawford. It appears, from what Barbara has told me, that many of the Magistrates dealing with 'care matters' or 'juvenile crime' are there because they have little choice. While there are some very committed Children's Court Magistrates, many are waiting to move on to 'bigger and better things.'

Recommendations:

- That Magistrates for 'Care matters' be selected from the very best of our Judges and select the ones who have a real commitment to the care of young people.
- That these Magistrates be trained to deal with 'care matters' – understanding the impact of abuse, the risks of leaving young people in dangerous situations and family dynamics.

Developing new strategies of investigation:

Youth Off the Streets is often notified of children and young people being at risk. However, very often we are not given enough information to be able to move the notification forward. People are too frightened to come forward, believe that if they identify the victim that they will be kept out of the young person's life, don't have enough evidence. In one case recently, we engaged the services of a reputable Private Investigator to gather the evidence to move the case forward or to demonstrate that the reporter was not reliable. Such strategies are costly, but should be more available to services when a child is thought to be at risk.

Mandatory reporting:

3 out of 4 cases of abuse are identified as a result of Mandatory reporting. This further supports my recommendation that the wider community is educated on how to identify young people and children who are at risk and how to go about reporting it.

There is a concern that doctors are loathe to report cases of abuse. This must be addressed and again an education program should be targeted at them, particularly for General Practitioners.

Conclusion:

In 1990 the Federal Government signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. But we must ask ourselves, have we lived up to our commitment or is it purely a symbolic one?

Our children are in trouble. If we do nothing, it will be at our own peril.

We must accept our responsibility as law makers, law enforcers, service providers, educators, case workers, consumer marketers and most importantly, as adults, to ensure that we are doing our best to protect every one of our Nation's children.

Through replicating already existing and successful outreach and early intervention programmes, by ensuring that young people and victims of abuse have appropriate care and support both legally and medically, by providing the appropriate support to those given the authority to protect our children, by educating all adults in Australia about their responsibility to our youth and by educating all young people in schools around Australia about their rights and the support that is available to them (especially in the case of sexual abuse) we will achieve the kind of society that is worthy of the miracle of children.