



Anglicare
TASMANIA™

SUBMISSION TO

Tasmanian State Government 2014-15 Budget
Community Consultation

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Executive Summary

“Looking after children is a whole-of-community job and the provision of services in support of that job is a whole-of-government responsibility”. The Hon. Michelle O’Byrne MP, Minister for Children¹

Anglicare Tasmania welcomes the opportunity to participate in the State Budget Community Consultation process for 2014-15. This submission focuses on the needs of young Tasmanians and their families and the priority we believe they should be given in the budget.

Since the *National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009-2020* was prepared, substantial work has been done as a whole of community response to ensure children, young people, and their families are supported, educated, protected, and nurtured. Anglicare recognises the good work of the Tasmanian Government to fulfil its obligations under the National Framework, particularly the establishment of Gateway and Integrated Family Support Services (IFSS) and the building of new youth accommodation models for the State. Anglicare also recognises the State Government’s efforts to consolidate recommendations from numerous reports and reviews about the Child Protection System including investigations by a Select Committee and the Commissioner for Children (DHHS 2012).

In the last twelve months the State Government has sought a number of community submissions relating to the wellbeing of children and young people. Anglicare Tasmania has provided advice to the Government on the following:

- *Legislative Reform Project: Amendments to the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997* – February 2013
- *Youth Ethics Framework for Tasmania* - 2012
- *A continuum of care to prevent youth offending and re-offending* – July 2013
- *Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Bill* – October 2013

And to the Commissioner for Children regarding:

- *Alternatives to secure detention for youth in Tasmania* – February 2013

Anglicare Tasmania recommends that Tasmania’s children and young people become the budget priority. Researchers and community organisations have all put resources into producing these submissions and reports. The Government now has an opportunity to allocate money towards their realisation.

Anglicare recommends that the State Government allocate \$10 million in the 2014-14 State Budget to nurturing and empowering Tasmania’s children, young people and their families. We offer the following recommendations to support this based on the work of our services and research undertaken by our Social Action and Research Centre (SARC).

In the last 12 months SARC has focused its research in this field and is currently in the process of publishing three substantial research reports:

¹ Minister for Children, Michelle O’Byrne 2012, *Sharing Responsibility for Our Children, Young People and Their Families: Government Embracing Change in Response to the Select Committee on Child Protection Final Report 2011*, Hobart, viewed 3 October 2013, <http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/94661/Government_Response_Public_Final_v3.pdf>.

- *Roof over my heart*: exploring youth homelessness in Tasmania from the perspective of young people who have been homeless (Pryor in press 2013);
- *Parents in the child protection system*: documenting the experiences of 47 parents who have been involved with Tasmania's Child Protection Services and the experiences of over 140 frontline workers employed by 40 different non-government services (NGOs). The research also collates the views of 16 Child Protection staff and five lawyers involved in Child Protection work (Hinton in press 2013); and
- *A necessary engagement: An international review of parent and family engagement in child protection*: providing a review of international models of engagement, support and advocacy for parents who have contact with child protection systems (Ivec in press 2013).

Anglicare recommends that \$10 million be invested in improving statutory Child Protection Services and the out-of-home care system, expansion of the Integrated Family Support Services, investment in advocacy and the legal system, investment in schools, and investment in youth housing and support. Our research indicates that if these areas are bolstered Tasmania will see improved outcomes for our children.

Introduction to Anglicare Tasmania

Anglicare is the largest community service organisation in Tasmania with offices in Hobart, Glenorchy, Launceston, St Helens, Devonport, and Burnie, and a range of programs in rural areas. Anglicare's services include emergency relief and crisis services, accommodation support, employment services, mental health services, acquired injury, disability and aged care services, alcohol and other drug services, and family support. In addition, SARC conducts research, policy and advocacy work with a focus on issues affecting Tasmanians on low incomes.

Anglicare Tasmania is committed to achieving social justice for all Tasmanians. It is our mission to speak out against poverty and injustice and offer decision makers alternative solutions to help build a more just society. We provide opportunities for people in need to reach their full potential through our services, staff, research, and advocacy.

Anglicare's work is guided by a set of values which include these beliefs:

- that each person is valuable and deserves to be treated with respect and dignity;
- that each person has the capacity to make and to bear the responsibility for choices and decisions about their life;
- that support should be available to all who need it; and
- that every person can live life abundantly.

Anglicare provides services for children, young people and families including Communities for Children, long-term and crisis accommodation (such as Thyne House² and Youthcare³), drug support for young people, a range of parenting courses and counselling services⁴ and a reunification service.

² Thyne House: Long-term accommodation for young people aged 16-25 in Launceston.

³ Youthcare: Crisis shelter for young males aged 13-20 years old in the South.

⁴ For a full list of Anglicare's services in this area go to: <http://www.anglicare-tas.org.au/Supportandcounselling.aspx>

Recommendations

Investment in improvement of statutory child protection services

*At June 2011, 966 children were in out-of-home care in Tasmania. This is an increase of 45 per cent since 30 June 2007. In addition to the increased **number** of children in the care system at census time, a greater **proportion** of Tasmania's children were in care.*
(Department of Health and Human Services, 2012).

Currently, the needs of children, young people, and their families in Tasmania are met by government, government funded community services, schools, and families. The best outcomes for children and young people are achieved when all these services and supports work together to meet the needs of the child, with the child at the centre. Anglicare's 'Pathway Home'⁵ program demonstrates this partnership at its best. Pathway Home is a service for children and young people who have been in out-of-home care and their families to assist them to reunify and return home. Anglicare works with the young person, his or her family, Child Protection, the Out-Home-Care team, the school, and any other relevant service to support the family and the child to make reunification possible, successful and joyful.

This need for better partnership guides our recommended changes to Child Protection Services and the out-of-home care system. We urge the Government to fund Child Protection to begin to develop a culture and practices that make partnership a reality.

1. That the State Government/Child Protection Service incorporate the following as part of standard practice:
 - Clear, accountable and transparent decision making processes which involve parents from the beginning of their contact with the child protection system or prior to it;
 - Clarity about goals and timescales;
 - Recognition of the parental responsibilities of men and their inclusion in decision making about their children;
 - A culture which offers choice, hope and empathy and which treats people with respect; and
 - Recognition of the importance of relationships between individual child protection workers and parents for positive outcomes. This requires the building of communication and engagement skills across the workforce and promoting consistency in practice.
2. That the Child Protection Service invest in specialist staff to foster working relationships with external agencies and stakeholders and raise awareness of issues affecting particular cohorts of parents. These cohorts might include Aboriginal parents, parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and parents with mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues.
3. That the State Government ensures the development of a coordinated approach between Child Protection, Housing Tasmania and Centrelink to reduce the severe financial impact and risk to housing for families in contact with the child protection system and reunification processes.
4. That the funding to the Child Protection Service be increased to enable it to meet its statutory requirements and current demand for assessments and investigations, including assessing homeless young people residing in shelters. This would enable the Child Protection Service to

⁵ For more information on Pathway Home go to: <http://www.anglicare-tas.org.au/Supportandcounselling/Parenting/Pathwayhome.aspx>

work closely with the proposed expanded family support programs to ensure that families and children receive adequate support for the duration of their involvement with child protection services.

Investment in the out-of-home care system

At present the number of children and young people in the out-of-home care system is too high and the outcomes for many of them are poor. Of particular concern is a lack of teamwork between birth families, parents and the Department and under-resourced access arrangements which can leave parents and children confused and distressed. In addition there are currently shortfalls in the ability of the service system to address trauma-related issues and meet the therapeutic needs of children as well as to effectively manage transitions out of the care system. We urge the State Government to provide more resources to improve the out-of-home care system and ensure adequate support for young people moving into independent living.

5. That the Child Protection Service pursue mechanisms to encourage partnership working between birth families, carers and child protection workers for the best interests of children.
6. That the Child Protection Service be resourced to meet its obligations to facilitate access arrangements as ordered by the Court.
7. That the After Care Support Program be resourced to provide 'parent-like' support in areas of financial, vocational, practical and emotional need until the young person is ready for independence, up to age 25.
8. That all Child Protection and out-of-home care staff be trained in trauma-informed care as a matter of priority.
9. That the Child Protection Service be adequately resourced to promptly assess and meet the therapeutic needs of children and young people in the out-of-home care system
10. That the proposed expansion of Tasmania's out-of-home system include the establishment of residential treatment facilities in each region with capacity to provide intensive clinical support for young people with mental health, drug and alcohol and behavioural difficulties.

Investment in integrated family support services

The State Government is well aware of cycles of homelessness, poverty and disadvantage, and that a large number of parents involved in the Child Protection services were themselves children of the system. We know that people need extra support at various transition points in their lives and as a community we need to make sure the support is there. This is especially the case for parents with disability.

The DHHS IFSS, Gateway services, Child and Family Centres, and Targeted Youth Support Services are all valuable initiatives that are available at these key times. Anglicare service staff and our research indicate the success of the IFSS and Gateway services to date and encourage the State Government to invest further in these support services, to increase their capacity and to promote their connections in the community to ensure government, non-government agencies and families are all working together towards the same goal. We make the following recommendations in this area:

11. That the State Government invest in the provision of intensive support for families at risk of entering or already within the Child Protection Service through the DHHS Gateway Services, Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS), and Targeted Youth Support Services/Supported Youth Programs (TYS) to ensure family case-managed support is provided to families and youth-specific support is provided to children/young people.
12. That the Tasmanian Government replicate and adequately fund a model such as 'Communities for Children Plus', whereby an agency is responsible for coordinating all existing family support initiatives in a given region (from the full range of local, state, federal and philanthropic funding sources) to ensure that collaboration and integration occurs between all family support initiatives in each region of Tasmania.
13. That the State Government review long-term support mechanisms for parents with a disability.

Investment in advocacy and the legal system

The following recommendations apply to both parents' involvement with the legal system in relation to child protection matters and young peoples' involvement with youth justice. The commonalities in their experiences are:

- being accused of wrongdoing
- little understanding of the legal system they are entering
- an inability to afford legal support or advice
- a need for advocates with a legal understanding to support them
- being victims themselves and in need of protection and support.

To support parents and young people we recommend the following:

14. That the State Government ensure access to free, expert independent advocacy for parents and acknowledge its place within the Child Protection Service.
15. That bail hostels are established in the South and North of the state in a new partnership agreement between Youth Justice and Housing Tasmania, and that the hostels be provided with adequate staffing to ensure residents have the support they need to meet bail conditions.
16. That more initiatives be established to support young people to meet bail conditions, including the provision of more community-based order placements and the provision of more support from Youth Justice workers .
17. That the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) require that Ashley Youth Detention Centre (AYDC) staff create and sustain links with community services and community members to enable community-based vocational pathways and relationships with positive adult role models for young people detained at Ashley, and that these links be supported post-release.

Investment in schools

Schools can be a place of nourishment or anguish for disadvantaged young people. Many young people involved with child protection have moved schools frequently and do not want their peers to know about their home life. Many homeless young people have a disjointed education experience and struggle to concentrate on schooling with no secure housing. At the same time schools can be a great resource for information and support for struggling young people. Many young people who participated in research into youth homelessness spoke highly of one particular school social worker

or one particular school teacher, who knew what was happening at home, was consistent and who connected them with the appropriate support (Pryor in press 2013).

Anglicare sees a real opportunity for schools to provide information about the services available in their community for families and young people and to be a part of the support wrapping around a family or young person in need.

We recommend:

18. That schools and training venues be resourced as key settings for the promotion of child and family wellbeing. This would be done by increasing the availability of psychologists and social workers to work with students and their families, and by providing extra training for teachers and welfare staff.
19. That the Government continue to develop and resource a suite of flexible and participatory learning methods for students who need it, both within schools and in alternative settings in all three regions.

Investment in youth housing and support

The drivers, causes and triggers of homelessness are complex and inter-related, as identified in Tasmania's Homelessness Plan, *Coming in from the Cold*. Young Tasmanians who become homeless have limited options available to them locally, as youth accommodation is scarce and limited, and does not always have a bed available for a young person on a given night. There is also a massive gap in specialist services for young people with particular needs, permanent youth accommodation options, and interventions for young people who are putting themselves at risk.

This section of our submission focuses on youth homelessness. However, youth homelessness is very often the result of family homelessness and breakdown so as in other recommendations in this submission, Anglicare would like to see a holistic approach to protecting children.

20. That, until a suite of out-of-home care and longer-term accommodation options are in place to provide 'exits' from the Supporting Housing System (SHS) system for young people, additional emergency and transitional beds be funded in SHS in the following quantities:
 - Five beds for young men and five beds for young women in the South;
 - Five beds for young men and three beds for young women in the North;
 - Five beds for young men and three bed for young women in the Northwest; and
 - Flexibility to house young couples and young parents in some facilities.
21. That Housing Tasmania resource Housing Connect with brokerage funds to provide at the discretion of workers, transport, travel vouchers, food and blankets to young people who are not able to be accommodated in an emergency facility and are expected to sleep rough on a given night.
22. That Housing Connect be funded to provide information and resources to schools and family services in both urban and rural locations to ensure that teachers, school welfare staff, students and families know of the housing and support options available for young people who need to live away from the family home.

23. That Housing Tasmania establishes more long-term 'Foyer-type'⁶ facilities in each region with the following capacity:
- 30 young men and 30 young women in the South⁷;
 - 40 young men and 40 young women in the North; and
 - 10 young men and 10 young women in the Northwest.
24. That, until a suite of out-of-home care and longer-term accommodation options are in place, Housing Tasmania develop public housing protocols with Housing Connect whereby young people aged 14 and 15 in receipt of independent government allowances and who have support may apply for direct tenancy in public or community housing.
25. That Housing Tasmania add 30 independent one- and two-bedroom units to public housing stock in the Northwest for use by young people and small families.
26. That two 'safe houses' be established on the West Coast as a matter of priority to ensure that children, young people and families there have access to emergency housing and support if needed.

⁶ With strong links between the housing provider and other service providers in the areas of health, wellbeing, education, training and employment.

⁷ If the Tasmanian Government establishes the proposed Trinity Hill Foyer-style accommodation in Southern Tasmania, the southern figures could be adjusted accordingly.

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