

Sydney 12 September 2008

“DOCS doesn’t cause child abuse and neglect”

says NAPCAN (the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect)

We’ve got it wrong according to NAPCAN. Somehow by attempting to address the critical issue of child abuse and neglect we’ve made it the government’s fault. Every time another horrific case of neglect or abuse comes to light in NSW we want to blame DOCS – we make it their problem.

The response to the case of the eight children in the Blue Mountains is a classic example. These children were found alone, neglected and living in squalor. Where are the parents? The neighbours say they feel guilty because they’d known things weren’t right....they must be asking themselves why they hadn’t helped earlier. Finally someone did do something - they rang DOCS.

All Australian states have progressively introduced mandatory reporting regimes for child abuse over recent years. Whilst the actual legislation differs from state to state, each makes it mandatory for certain professionals to report suspected cases of abuse or neglect. Somehow this sensible mechanism of last resort seems to have removed the responsibility from parents and the community to care for our children.

The result has been that Australia has 9 times the proportion of notifications of child abuse as the UK but only the same proportion of children are found to need to be removed for their own care and protection. (55.5 children per 1,000 are notified in Australia while only 6.5 per 1,000 are notified in the UK yet only an equal proportion approx 5 per 1,000 are taken into care)

Maree Faulkner, the CEO of NAPCAN, says that in attempting to address this critical issue we have managed to create a situation in which we act as if the care and well being of our children is solely the responsibility of government.

NAPCAN says that the responsibility for care of children is threefold

First the parents – “Where were they? Why had they not been able or willing to care for these children?”

Second the community – “We’ve all heard the truism...it takes a village to raise a child and we can’t help but ask.....where were the villagers in the Blue Mountains?”

What is going on in our neighbourhoods that we no longer know or care about the people and the children who live beside us.... we no longer think its OK to offer help even to children?”

Third government – “Yes government needs to do better.....not just the statutory child protection services such as DOCS but the programs and services that would have helped prevent this situation.

“We don’t yet know the full story of the family in the Blue Mountains but what we do know is that this family was in trouble – why weren’t there services that could have helped before these kids were so badly neglected and deserted?”

Almost 35,000 children were found to have been abused and neglected in Australia last year.

This week is National Child Protection Week.

NAPCAN is calling on the whole of the Australian community to take responsibility for stopping this abuse of our children.

For more information and interviews, please contact:

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About NAPCAN:

NAPCAN (National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect) is Australia’s leading advocate for the prevention of child abuse and neglect. NAPCAN’s goal is to bring about the changes necessary in individual and community behaviour and in government policy to stop abuse and neglect before it starts. NAPCAN also works directly with children and young people to strengthen protective behaviours, build resilience and life skills, assists ‘at risk’ parents through face-to-face programs and works in local communities building inclusive networks and strengthening local support for children and families. A charity, governed by a national board with the support of professional sub-committees and state and territory councils, NAPCAN is the founder of National Child Protection Week.

About National Child Protection Week:

National Child Protection Week (NCPW) is an annual initiative by the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN) to focus public attention on the critical importance of prevention of child abuse and neglect. Running from 7 September to 13 September, NCPW 2008 will involve thousands of businesses and government and community organizations

across Australia in activities highlighting the responsibility of all adults to help break the cycle of child abuse. The theme for the week is "Children See Children Do, Make Your Influence Positive".

For more information and to view the video visit www.napcan.org.au