

Subject: Protection for our most vulnerable -our children of Australia
Wednesday, 23 February, 2011

Dear Minister Wooldridge

I refer to correspondence that I had with Lord Mayor Robert Doyle on the above subject, and based on his advice I am writing to you.

I would like to put forward a submission for your consideration to protect the children who are being abused for no fault of theirs.

I refer to the following articles in the Herald Sun of 26 October (Page 16 - Children lost in the system and Page 24 Kids' welfare vital to us all). These articles were during your time as Opposition community services spokeswoman.

I also refer to the most recent article - Sex offenders free to prey - Police fail to protect children - Herald Sun Feb 10,2011

I am now writing to you in your role as Minister - Child Protection where you are in a position to take real action.

From what I have seen on TV and read in the newspapers or heard on the radio, one of the problems appears to be that the children who have been abused have no place to be sent to due to lack of foster homes and foster carers. What appears to be happening now is that the children are being sent back to their homes even though the authorities know that they are being abused because there is no other place to send them. There is no point in counselling the children and then sending them back to the place of abuse. As I see it, whenever there is a dangerous situation the best action is to remove the person from the harmful situation.

I would like to propose that the Government implements places known as 'safe homes' where children can be sent to after they have been removed from an abused home. This could be a long term transition arrangement where children could be housed in a safe environment.

This could take the form of a dormitory style accommodation with partitioned cubicles for individual children or children from the same family. Care and loving support could be provided from foster parents or grand parents or other people who care to provide love and support to the children. This could be on a roster basis to spread the supporting load. Professional support could be provided by visiting Doctors, Psychologists, Chaplains and other professionals. Of course this accommodation would need to be protected so that the children are safe and protected from harm. This would need to be supervised and monitored 24/7. No compromising on that.

I believe that a dormitory style accommodation with cubicles containing a bed, locker for children's valuables, bedside furniture, shared toilets and a shared recreation area would be a better alternative than sending the child back to the place where he or she is exposed once again to abuse. I know this would not equate to a 'home' but still it would be better than sending the child back to the abusive environment.

The benefits would be:

- a large number of children could be accommodated
- the child is not exposed to further abuse
- the child can sleep at night and not be afraid of being abused
- the child can go to school and not be afraid of getting home to face the abuse
- the DHS staff can focus on helping the child in a safe environment
- the health professionals and DHS staff could centralise their services in these safe houses rather than trying to help different children scattered all over the state
- we would reduce the harm that the children would be exposed to
- we would reduce the length of time that the children are being subjected to harm
- the sooner the child would be able to recover
- the lesser the opportunity for mental illness caused due to the trauma of abuse
- we would have stronger, happier children rather than sad, vulnerable, hurting children

These kind of caring programs are presently being done by Fr Chris Riley, Les Twentyman, Jim Steynes, Moira Kelley in their own way to care for disadvantaged children. It would be worth seeking advice from them on how such a program as I have proposed can be carried out.

The Salesian Missions (a Catholic institution) also carry out similar programs to care for disadvantaged children and they would be a good resource for advice as well.

Besides the above institutions, there are numerous other institutions who care for homeless and disadvantaged children. It would be useful to find out whether they could be supported to expand their services since they are already doing the job or collaborate with them to offer an additional service such as the one I have proposed.

As a parent I do not think that money should be a stumbling block to protecting the children. It is in the best interests of our country to take care of our children.

Let us not waste time in inquiries and green papers or white papers or blue papers let us find out from people who are taking care of disadvantaged children on how they are doing it and what is the best way forward and take action so that the children are not suffering while we are having discussions and meetings and conferences and judicial inquiries.

If you need someone to help coordinate such a program I shall be glad to offer my services since I am an experienced administrator and passionate about helping the children. However that is not the point or not the reason I have written to you. I just want action done URGENTLY and I am willing to help if such assistance is required.

But PLEASE, PLEASE DO SOMETHING SOON TO HELP OUR MOST VULNERABLE, OUR CHILDREN OF AUSTRALIA.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely
Geraldine D'Costa