



MEDIA RELEASE

23 JANUARY 2008

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

The report *Child Protection Australia 2006-07* from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) is a timely reminder of how much more we need to do to protect children from abuse through preventative support for families.

"For the 28,000 children now placed into out of home care there may have been a time when this could have been prevented, had parents and the broader family network received appropriate and effective support to turn things around and avoid the crisis" said Sam Page, Executive Director of Family Relationship Services Australia (FRSA).

"We need to build the safety net around children at risk to identify them sooner and intervene earlier. Community organisations that are embedded in their local area are best placed to build relationships with families before problems arise or become a crisis. Investing in flexible family support programs that allow agencies to tailor responses to individual families and coordinate a range of activities across programs can have a real impact" said Jo Cavanagh, CEO Family Life.

There is also an opportunity to substantially improve prevention efforts by allowing people to move more easily between services and programs. When one agency can provide case management and arrange for a range of supports to be provided across services the capacity to address multiple risk factors such as financial stress, mental health issues and housing instability is vastly enhanced. In practice this is very difficult to achieve, service systems each have their own eligibility criteria, data collection systems, intake procedures and waiting lists which can make it nearly impossible to provide a holistic response to the needs of a family.

Family Relationship Services Australia is part of a coalition of organisations supporting the development of a national approach to child protection to create a partnership between State/Territory and Federal Governments as well as community organisations.

The election of the new Federal Government provides a unique opportunity to work towards greater alignment between service systems across jurisdictions. FRSA members are keen to work with all levels of government to assist this process and increase attention to strengthening families to prevent child abuse and neglect.

-ENDS-

FRSA Media Contact: Bonnie Montgomery, 02 6162 1811 or 0406 628 239

Family Relationship Services Australia is the national peak body for over 100 family relationship service providers, operating in more than 400 locations across Australia. FRSA's vision is for an Australian society that is enriched through respectful relationships in all their diversity.
--