

Community Services Update

June 2008

Factsheet

Family and Children's Services – Reforms and new Initiatives

The Care and Protection of Children Act 2007

In December 2003 the NT Government announced a five year plan to reform the Child Protection System in the NT and substantial new investment.

The key actions of the plan included additional growth funding for the Family and Children's Services Program from 1 January 2004, and a commitment to review and replace the dated *Community Welfare Act 1983*, with new comprehensive and contemporary child protection legislation.

The new ***Care and Protection of Children Act 2007*** was passed by the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly on 28 November and will be implemented in stages during 2008.

The Act received bi-partisan support and a commitment to review the Act after 12 months of operation to make any necessary modifications apparent once the Act is operating.

The new Act was the result of extensive consultation over several years and independent review by a national child protection expert. Consultation occurred with Government departments, statutory authorities, non-government agencies, communities, organisations and a number of individuals throughout the Northern Territory.

New features of the Legislation

The Act maintains universal mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect, provides for more contemporary and flexible responses to working with families at risk, and introduces a number of new features:

- an independent Children's Commissioner
- Criminal History Screening for Child Related Employment
- a Child Death Review and Prevention Committee
- extension of support to young people leaving care up to the age of 25
- expansion of the licensing requirements for children's care and development services.

Children's Commissioner

The Northern Territory Government has appointed Mr Howard Bath to the independent position of Children's Commissioner.

The role will act as an advocate for protected children and represent their best interests at all levels of government and the community and will have considerable influence to promote more effective care for our most vulnerable children.

The Children's Commissioner will oversight and manage complaints about services for children in care and provide advice to Government on strengthening the child protection system.

Another key part of the role of the Children's Commissioner will be to monitor the implementation of the Closing the Gap initiatives as they relate to child protection, in response to the Little Children are Sacred Report.

Dr Howard Bath is recognised nationally as a leading clinical psychologist with extensive experience in the children's and youth sector, particularly youth with complex needs and challenging behaviours.

Dr Bath is a registered clinical psychologist and has studied and taught in both Australian and the United States and is widely published in the areas of behaviour management, out-of-home care, family preservation, and more recently the treatment of young people with sexual behaviour. He was the inaugural chair of the Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia.

The new office will commence operation in June 2008.

