Child Protection Reports Released

The first independent report into the progress of the reforms of the Territory’s child protection system has found the reforms are on track, the Minister for Children and Families, Kon Vatskalis, said today.

Mr Vatskalis today released the first report from the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee in Parliament today.

The independent Committee comprises national and local child protection experts and was appointed by the Henderson Government to monitor and report on progress of the reforms announced in the Board of Inquiry’s report into the child protection system, Growing them strong, together.

“In its first report since the Growing them strong, together was handed down, the Committee found the Department of Children and Families is on track with the reform process and applauded the substantial work that has occurred,” Mr Vatskalis said.

The NT Ombudsman’s Report into child protection was also released in Parliament today.

The External Monitoring report notes the substantial changes that have been achieved to date include:

- The reduction in the backlog of child protection investigations identified by the Board of Inquiry from 870 cases in October 2010 to zero by the end of May 2011;
- The introduction of new assessment tools, better support for frontline workers, including reforms to the Central Intake System to create a 24/7 response to child protection concerns;
- The establishment and funding of new partnership arrangements with the Northern Territory Council of Social Services, CREATE Foundation and Foster Care Northern Territory;
- The establishment of a new system of reward and recognition for foster and kinship carers, including the Carer Excellence Awards to recognise the commitment and dedication of our carers;
- The funding of AMSANT to establish a new Aboriginal child, youth and families peak body and the appointment of the first Chief Executive of this peak body, Ms Josie Crawshaw.
“The committee has met in Darwin and Alice Springs and heard from Department of Children and Families officials, visited several non-government organisations while the Committee Chair, Professor Graham Vimpani, also appeared before the Council of Territory Co-operation.

The Committee also noted it is report that it was ‘impressed’ with the openness and candid discussion with Departmental staff and partner agencies.”

Mr Vatskalis said the Committee’s report also noted that reform of child protection and family support system does not occur quickly and that changes of this magnitude to the child protection system were ‘….a challenge comparable with changing course for an ocean liner’.

“The report notes that real and effective changes that benefit Territory families will take time, patience, energy and a clear vision of what is needed to achieve better outcomes are necessary qualities,” he said.

Mr Vatskalis said the report into Child Protection prepared by the Northern Territory Ombudsman reinforces why our child protection reforms are so important. He said the report had been provided to the Children’s Commissioner.

“We acknowledge the Ombudsman’s recommendations and they will be incorporated into the Department of Children and Families ongoing implementation of the 147 reforms recommended by the Board of Inquiry.”

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