



MEDIA RELEASE

13 MAY 2009

COMMISSIONER'S COLLOQUIUM – RESPONSIBILITY FOR KIDS IN CARE

This Friday 15 May Tasmania's Children's Commissioner Paul Mason hosts the second of his expert seminars for 2009: "Visiting Children - Perspectives on Independence". Human Services Minister the Hon Lin Thorp MLC will open the Colloquium which is being conducted for policy makers and care service providers.

There are currently about 700 children and young people in child protection out-of-home care in Tasmania aged from days old to 18 years.

"For these kids, the State Government has become their "parent", either short or long term," said Mr Mason. "Foster parents, extended families, rostered workers and Child Protection Workers caring for children on orders put enormous effort into doing their very best for kids. But they can have other pressures and ultimately it is the State which is responsible for the kids' level of wellbeing."

This Colloquium examines how different governments deal with two big questions: how to make sure that children in care have their experience of that care heard by their Government "parent" and how to make sure that this "parent" is responding.

Colloquium speakers include Michael Piraino about a volunteer court-supervised system in the US; Pam Simmons (South Australia's Children's Guardian) about random monitoring of Government care; Alasdair Roy (ACT's Children's Commissioner) about the ACT Public Advocate monitoring powers; Barry Salmon (Qld's Assistant Children's Commissioner) about the comprehensive monthly individual visiting scheme run by the Commissioner's Office; and Mark Byrne (Tasmania's Director of Disability, Child, Youth and Family Services) about the nature of supervising care in Tasmania's new "Future Communities" child protection and family support system.

Mr Mason said "The child needs a strong and secure relationship with some adult so they feel safe to talk about anything at all related to their care, so the common question is: who should that adult be?"

"When Governments have to take on parenting, the sheer size and hierarchical structure makes it hard to deliver and adjust the fine daily details which matter to kids. Governments depend on the individual human carers and workers but all sorts of conflicts can arise if something is going wrong for the child.

“Carers may not want to admit their care is not working for a child. Child protection workers may not want to antagonise the carer, nor create more work by defending the rights of children against carers on the one hand and senior managers on the other. NGOs funded to employ carers may not want to admit their service cannot deal with an individual child or that their own systems are causing problems for the child. Elected Governments may not want to admit in public that the system they designed and operate is not delivering what it promised – until a crisis forces them to confess failure and even sometimes to pay damages compensation for harm.

“Inventive solutions are needed for this thorny problem.”

The Colloquium will start 9.30am on Friday 15 May at the Baha’i Learning Centre, Macquarie Street. Media are welcome to attend. RSVP to 6233 9325.

For further information, contact the Children’s Commissioner on mobile 0438 555 473.