

## **PROTECTING THE WELLBEING OF CHILDREN DURING COVID-19** **April 2020**

The COVID-19/coronavirus pandemic has caused many significant changes to the lives of our children and young people – and will continue to do so for some time.

Emergency responses to the pandemic have been swift, well-executed and adopted by most Tasmanians. Our leaders, health officials and essential workers are doing a terrific job.

Some children I've spoken to see the changes as necessary and good: they like being home and spending more time with their families than they ever have before. They are focusing on life's simple joys – playing, cooking, gardening, talking and taking a welcome break from hectic school and afterschool activities.

Others are not enjoying it. Some feel isolated from their friends or they're missing their normal social engagements and activities. Some are living in families affected by job losses. They may have even lost their own job.

Sadly, for others, coronavirus has made life more stressful and more unsafe. For some, COVID-19 means they are forced to spend more time in households where family violence, drugs or alcohol dominate.

Tragically, lockdowns can also present opportunities for child abusers to harm children.

Changes to schooling arrangements mean that children won't have the usual face-to-face access to teachers or support staff to talk about incidents or concerns. Further, support and intervention services including child safety services have also had to change their approach, minimising face-to-face activities to essential situations only. These changes all have the potential to compromise the wellbeing of children.

Now, more than ever, we must work together to care for children and young people in Tasmania. Our focus must be particularly on those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged no matter what the reason and therefore already at risk of being marginalised. We must establish new ways of working, to ensure we have oversight of vulnerable children.

Children often need more than financial support. They need a safe place to go, a trusted adult to talk to and access to a range of therapeutic supports to help them manage and improve their wellbeing, both now and into the future.

Significant investments into family violence support services, mental health services and child safety services have been announced at federal and state levels – all of which are very welcome.



However, how this money is put to use, how responses are designed and implemented and how we track the impact on the lives of vulnerable or disadvantaged children and young people will be the real measure of our success.

As Commissioner for Children and Young People in Tasmania, I remain firmly committed to monitoring our response to the pandemic and advocating for the rights and wellbeing of all children and young people in the State.

I will continue to advocate that their views and ideas are sought, heard and taken into account when determining coronavirus responses. I will also be:

- actively engaging with and listening to any concerns raised by children and young people, service providers, advocacy organisations, family and carers and other community members about the provision of services and supports
- bringing stakeholders together so we can learn from each other and engage in shared advocacy on issues of concern, thereby reducing fragmentation of effort
- monitoring data and other information relevant to the impact of the pandemic through specific data requests of government agencies, service providers, advocacy organisations and other key stakeholders
- advocating for improved responses to the pandemic by providing advice to key government and non-government decision-makers about issues affecting the rights and wellbeing of Tasmanian children and young people in the context of the pandemic.

I am well aware that once we have come through the response phase, we will need to turn our attention to recovery, both socially and economically.

The rights and wellbeing of children and young people during that time will be as important as they are now.

We must remember: investing in the wellbeing of our children and young people not only upholds their rights, but also provides the foundation for prosperity for all Tasmanians, irrespective of age.

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