

OUR CHILDREN

our CONCERN • our RESPONSIBILITY

families
australia

WHAT THIS CAMPAIGN IS ABOUT

Child abuse and neglect issues have had a very high profile in the media in recent times. Much of the focus has been on child sexual abuse that occurred many years ago in institutional environments. Families Australia shares the concerns and revulsion of the community about these events.

We believe that if there is any lesson to be learned from what happened to these children in the past, it is that we, the community and governments, should do everything that we can to stop child abuse and neglect.

The reality is that the numbers of children being abused and/or neglected in Australia continues to rise steadily.

There are many reasons why governments have not been able to stem the increase in child abuse and neglect but one underlying factor is that rapid social change, in particular the increasing incidence of substance abuse, has changed the dynamics of child abuse and neglect in Australia and elsewhere.

Historically, children came into care because parents were not able to financially support their family. During the latter part of the nineteenth century the main cause was the breakdown of the family unit brought about by drought, recession and unemployment. Today, children usually come into care because they have been or are at high risk of being significantly harmed (Forde 1999:112).

In 2001-2002, 137,938 notifications of Australian children 'at risk' of child abuse or neglect were reported to the State authorities. State and Territory governments are under such pressure that it is impossible for them to investigate every notification of child abuse.

In the same period, 30,473 of the cases investigated were substantiated (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2003). This is over 9,000 cases more than only a decade ago (AIHW 1993).

Far from being given an opportunity for a fresh start, many children who enter the care system end up being shunted from pillar to post because of failed attempts by the child protection system to reunite them with their parents.

Placement breakdown and instability compound the earlier abuse experienced by these children. The long term consequences of this include: poor education, higher levels of post-care unemployment, transient lifestyles, depression, suicide, teenage pregnancy, involvement in crime and difficulties in parenting the next generation (Cashmore and Paxman 1996, CAFWAA 2002).

Families Australia, like the rest of our community, believes child abuse and neglect is an issue of such magnitude as to be of national concern. This campaign is intended to seek solutions through the adoption of a national approach to the issue. We believe that the State, Territory and Commonwealth Governments must come together to find solutions to help Australia's most vulnerable children.

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