

This submission is sent to the Senate Inquiry to demonstrate the inadequacy of alternative care in the State of South Australia. We, as former carers and the maternal grandmother of a deceased (by suicide) foster child have found that:

- a) children are left in their dysfunctional homes for much too long because reports of child abuse are being ignored by statutory child protection services in this State;
- b) by the time children are taken into foster care, they are so severely disturbed that they are unfosterable;
- c) The department's case workers are not sufficiently well educated to be able to give advice and support to foster-carers who experience unmanageable behaviours, such as setting fire to the foster-cares' home, drug and alcohol abuse, offering sex to residents and visitors, exhibiting sexualised behaviours, molesting other foster children or accusing them or foster-carers of sexual abuse.. to say noting of theft and driving stolen cars;
- d) The defence mechanism used by incompetent case-workers and supervisors is to denigrate the foster-carer with accusations that they are either (a) too emotionally involved with the child or (b) not coping. The foster-carer is then threatened with de-registration and the loss of all foster children. If the carer persists in seeking help or advice, she is de-registered.
- e) The result is that the children are pushed from placement to placement adding to the Further insecurity and instability to their lives. There is obvious need for small group residence with trained therapists as the current situation is not in heinterests of either carers or children.

Foster care is in crisis. Untrained foster carers are being given responsibility for the care of these badly damaged and difficult children. Department case-workers are showing profound ignorance relating to children's needs and development: for example they are separating siblings and scattering them across the State "because it makes it easier for us if they're not together". The children then never see their siblings.

One of the workers mentioned in the attached report is alleged to have told the parents of an 11 year old girl with Down Syndrome, sexually abused by a taxi driver (who is married to a DHS social worker) that they should have expected abuse to happen because of her behaviour. When the offended parent asked what she meant, the social worker replied: "She smiles at everybody". Needless to say, no-one is ever arrested or charged when the victim is disabled.

The SA Department for Human Services (Family and Youth Services) has been the subject of so many complaints either for (a) not investigating reports of child abuse, (b) not removing children from their dangerous homes or (c) mishandling foster placements that it is reported to be taking over the supervision of foster carers from Anglicare (who have done this work extremely effectively for many years). If the Department handles this as badly as it has handled child protection, God help the children. In the meantime, the staff lie to cover their inadequacies and the Minister is given misinformation .. just as in "Yes, Minister". We have sought a meeting with the Minister since August 2002 but are being fobbed off. In the meantime, in response to the criticisms in Robyn Layton's 2003 report "Our best investment", the Minister is

about to launch a new “independent” unit to investigate complaints against the department. And who is going to run this group?  
Why, of course, the manager of one of her departments!

To check the authenticity of this report, please contact Barbara Cowell at the phone number provided.