



Christians for an Ethical Society Canberra

A Working Group of the Social Justice Commission of the NSW Ecumenical Council & associate member of the ACT Council of Churches
President - Bishop George Browning

www.ces.org.au
PO Box 5079, Hughes ACT 2605
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A deficit in trust and support: systemic failure of child protection

"There are low levels of trust between various parties in the child protection system" according to research findings from the Community Capacity Building in Child Protection' projects undertaken at ANU's Regulatory Institutions Network. Mary Ivec, member of the research team, will be speaking at a forum this evening of Christians for an Ethical Society on getting the child protection system right.

Ms Ivec advocates more empowering practices which better engage parents, families and their care networks. "We interviewed parents following their first encounter with child protection authorities and conducted a national survey of child protection workers and those working alongside child protection authorities" said Ms Ivec. "We found low levels of trust between various parties, centralized and closed decision making by authorities, which were rarely open to review. The findings also reveal a "work force which is overstretched and highly stressed.

These issues are not receiving the public attention they deserve in part because legislative confidentiality serves to hide the failings of the present system.

Ms Ivec observed that all too often sources of support remained alienated from the problem-solving process. In contrast, a number of highly successful practices and programs exist within and sit alongside child protection systems overseas and to a lesser extent, even in Australia.

Ms Ivec appealed for governments, the wider community, parents, families and carers affected by the child protection system to explore how we can build trust between parties. "We must build empowering and participatory processes which enable shared decision making as well as shared responsibility."

Ms Ivec endorsed the conclusion of Professor Fiona Arney of the Australian Centre for Child Protection in South Australia that millions of dollars are wasted on ineffective measures to remove children from families when support networks such as extended families could have been considered.

In 2011-12 the number of substantiations here in the ACT increased by 35% budgeted to cost \$54m this financial year. In the light of evidence of serious failings of this costly system, Christians for an Ethical Society calls on the Legislative Assembly to conduct an inquiry into the child protection system in the Territory that:

- Considers alternatives to the crisis driven legalistic model such as the adoption by the ACT of more restorative approaches which better engage parents and families in decisions about their children;
- Examines the avenues for administrative review of decisions by the Director-General, available to parents, families and carers in the ACT compared to other Australian jurisdictions

Time of forum: 7:30pm, Thursday 30 May 2013

Venue: Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, Blackall St, Barton

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