

Attention Gary Bell-Bray
Area Manager
Department of Community Development
PO Box 592 Port Hedland WA 6721

Re.: Children in Immigration Detention Centres

I would like to register my concern about the children in Port Hedland Immigration Detention Centre.

It is well documented that children in immigration detention centres suffer psychological harm as a direct consequence of their detention. I am concerned that this group of children are at risk as per the legislation.

I wish to lodge a Child Concern Report requiring investigation of possible child maltreatment under the terms of the *Child Welfare Act 1947 Section 4 (1)(k)*, as I believe that the children are living under such conditions as to indicate that their mental, physical and moral welfare is likely to be in jeopardy.

I request an assessment and a review of the circumstances under which the children and their families are living. The detention centre environment is lacking a level of care that meets the children's emotional needs, and protects their psychological and social well-being.

The children are at risk in their situation for the following reasons:

- 1) These children and young people have not committed a crime but are mandatorily confined in a detention centre.
- 2) They live behind a razor wire fence and have no freedom of movement.
- 3) They are not provided with independent legal advice, counsel or representation.
- 4) They are supervised by guards trained in corrective management.
- 5) They do not have a release date.
- 6) They have no direct access to early childhood services, paediatric medical or psychiatric care.
- 7) They live in a punitive climate of repression and fear.
- 8) They are exposed to seeing acts of violence and self-harm including suicide attempts.
- 9) They are at risk of physical, sexual and psychological abuse.
- 10) They are deprived of choosing friends and interacting with their peers.
- 11) They do not have access to full public education.

The impact on the children has devastating and far-reaching effects, causing psychological trauma that is likely to persist well into adulthood. It is difficult for families in the detention centre to have appropriate family interaction, and for children to

receive appropriate encouragement, nurturing and stimulation. These children and young people are socially isolated. The children's confidence and self-esteem are being damaged. At every age their emotional, behavioural and social development is being adversely affected with some young people expressing feelings of despair and suicidal intent.

I know that it is FaCS policy to keep children with their parents unless the parents pose a risk of harm to the children, a policy with which I agree. The separation of detained children from their parents would cause further trauma.

Please acknowledge receipt of this letter and document the fact that you have filed my report in your records. Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Cc: The Hon Sheila M McHale MLA
Minister for Community Development, Women's Interests, Seniors and Youth; Disability Services; Culture and the Arts
12th Floor, Dumas House
2 Havelock Street
WEST PERTH WA 6005

References to the legislation and its interpretation through reciprocal procedures/protocols with other government departments (eg WA Police) are at:

http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/wa/consol_act/cwa1947115/longtitle.html
http://www.fcs.wa.gov.au/_content/child_maltreatment_investigations/CHPROT.pdf
http://www.fcs.wa.gov.au/_content/legislation/legislat.html