

# Kids Come First, Every Time

Cassy O'Connor MP | Greens' Leader



**Every Tasmanian child has the right to feel safe, loved and wanted. When they are placed at risk, the State must be there to keep them safe.**

The protection of vulnerable children is a challenge for governments worldwide. Here in Tasmania, the system has consistently failed at risk children and young people.

This is no reflection on the dedicated staff who work in child protection, but the conditions they are required to work under, the lack of resourcing and untenably high case loads.

Over the past four years, the Liberals at first eroded funding and put the need to increase resources on hold while undertaking a lengthy reform process, then funded too little too late in the cycle of this government.

This has led to poor morale among overstretched and under-resourced child safety officers, the early resignation of an outstanding Commissioner for Children and a series of epic failures of children, with an out of home care contract awarded to a for-profit provider who allegedly substantially short changed the children in their care.

While current reforms are a positive step and supported by the Greens, they will only achieve better outcomes for children

and young people if funding and staffing across the Child Safety system is substantially increased.

If we want better outcomes for our children, we need more than a reform agenda, we need to put serious money on the table. The Greens are prepared to do just that.

## THE GREENS WILL

- ▲ Fund 50 new Child Safety Officers, 10 new administrative support staff and a dedicated policy officer.
- ▲ Develop a TasTAFE Diploma in Child, Youth and Family Intervention.
- ▲ Develop a Cadetship Program.
- ▲ Cease contracting of for-profit providers in child protection
- ▲ Prepare for extending out of home care to between 20 and 24 years of age.

## CHILD SAFETY STAFF

In Tasmania, 65.6% of child safety investigations take over 29 days to commence compared to the national average of 16.7%. Only 13.3% of investigations commence within 7 days, compared to the national average of 63.1%.

Once commenced, 51% of investigations take over 90 days to finalise, compared to a national average of 20.8%, and only 17% are completed within 28 days, compared to a national average of 39.1%.

74.1% of investigations are substantiated. This means that many at risk children are left in unsafe environments for over 119 days.

Tasmania also has the highest rate of children whose cases were not substantiated, and subsequently had a substantiated referral 12 months later, at 15.9%, compared to the national average of 11.8%.

Finally, once children enter the system, only 61% of them have documented case plans, compared to a national average of 85.3%.<sup>1</sup>

This all comes down to staffing levels. The Greens will invest in 50 new child safety officers to begin turning these numbers around.

The Liberals claimed to have “quarantined” child safety frontline services from their harsh budget cuts when what they needed to do was increase funding from day one of their time in government. The funding shortfall was felt in the reduction of administrative staff forcing child safety officers to perform administrative duties. We will hire 10 new administrative officers to reduce to administrative workload of frontline staff.

Child Safety Services has restricted policy capacity, and has had to rely on the office of the Commissioner as a de facto office for policy advice, which it is not funded or equipped to provide.

We will hire a policy officer in Child Safety Services. The Policy Officer will examine the cost of extending Out of Home Care by between 2-6 years (ages 20 to 24) and produce recommendations to government.

We will also ensure that services are never again contracted out to for profit providers.

## FAMILY INTERVENTION DIPLOMA

Early intervention ensures that families stay together, or are reunited sooner. It helps to mend relationships and build trust.

It also means that the government doesn't accrue substantial costs associated with care, so more resources are available for desperately under-resourced children in care.

Under the Liberals, expenditure on Intensive Family Support Services per child has decreased from \$71.82 to \$63.11, compared to the national average of \$78.45.<sup>2</sup>

Many other states offer Diplomas in Child, Youth and Family Intervention.<sup>3</sup> We will fund TasTAFE to develop a similar diploma program, in consultation with Child and Youth Services. The State will wholly fund these courses in order to attract applicants.

## CADETSHIP PROGRAM TRIAL

We will initiate a trial cadetship program in child safety services. Cadets will assist child safety officers with their workloads, without being given inappropriate levels of responsibility. Cadets will be required to be enrolled in an eligible course.

This program will help students enter the workforce with more practical experience, and also help to attract young people to the field by offering paid employment while studying.

The program will aim to attract young people with a lived experience, who have been through the child protection system.

## INITIATIVE COST

Initiative Investment (\$m)	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	4 <sup>th</sup> Year
Child Safety Officers	3.95	4.03	4.11	4.19
Administrative Officers	0.66	0.67	0.69	0.70
Policy Officer	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.11
Diploma of Child, Youth and Family Intervention	0.30	0.65	0.66	0.68
Cadetship Program	0.00	0.30	0.31	0.31
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.91</b>	<b>5.65</b>	<b>5.77</b>	<b>5.88</b>

## REFERENCES

1. [Productivity Commission, "Child Protection Services", Report of Government Services 2018, Chapter 16, Attachment Tables.](#)

2. [ibid](#)

3. [Queensland, New South Wales, and South Australia.](#)