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MEDIA RELEASE

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Guardian reports that safety of children in care continues to be of great concern

For the third consecutive year, the *Guardian for Children and Young People Annual Report* states that safety and stability in care continues to be the biggest advocacy issue raised by children and young people in care, with the highest number of concerns coming from those living in residential or commercial care.

“Children and young people contact us to tell us they don’t feel safe in their placements and to ask for our advocacy to move elsewhere,” Guardian for Children and Young People, Penny Wright said.

The most commonly reported safety issues include fear of, and risks posed by, co-residents, due to bullying, intimidation, threats of harm, physical assaults, harmful sexual behaviour, verbal abuse, witnessing property damage and being pressured/coerced to engage in substance abuse and criminal activity.

“These concerns often arise from inadequate and sometimes rushed placement matching, which is usually the result of limited placement options. This is alarming, particularly as we expect the number of children and young people coming into care to further increase due to additional social and economic stressors from the COVID-19 pandemic,” Ms Wright said.

“The consequences of not being safe and living with fear are enduring, and affect children’s life outcomes. The safety of these children and young people is everybody’s business.”

As at 30 June 2020 there were 4,263 children and young people under the guardianship of the Chief Executive through care and protection court orders – an increase of 9.5% from the previous year. The number of Aboriginal children and young people in care also increased by 13% from last year’s numbers, reflecting a nation-wide systemic trend of Aboriginal children and young people being drastically overrepresented in child protection systems.

“While trying to cope with these increasing numbers, I acknowledge that DCP is also working hard to make residential care safer for children, with improved practices and policies around their physical and emotional environments.”

Ms Wright also holds the role of Child and Young Person’s Visitor which monitors and advocates for the best interests of children and young people living in residential care, although the role is currently unfunded.

“Currently in my office there is one advocate for every 1,400 children and young people in care, so while we wait for system improvements we can’t fully support the increasing numbers of young people in care, or provide adequate oversight of the challenges faced by them,” Ms Wright said.

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