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Families SA failure: Children removed by Families SA sleeping in offices is unacceptable

A news article earlier this week reported State Opposition's child protection spokesperson Rachel Sanderson claimed that 'vulnerable children were being forced to sleep on mattresses because demand for emergency foster care was higher on weekends'. It is not farfetched to assume that many of these 'vulnerable children' include a high number of Aboriginal kids and ALRM is alarmed to hear that children are kept in such circumstances.

In their 2014-2015 Annual Report, the Office of the Guardian of Children and Young People reported as of 30 June 2015, that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children made up 29% of the total number of children under the guardianship of the Minister through care and protection court orders. This figure did not include the 77 interim or temporary orders. The Annual report also stated that almost one in three children in state care identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. The situational crisis for children within Families SA (FSA) has a direct impact upon the Aboriginal community. The removal of Aboriginal children by FSA is escalating resulting in a loss of family, community and culture.

ALRM takes the view that the Minister must acknowledge their duty of care to ensure that alternative accommodation, e.g. extended family members are given priority consideration to place children, in line with the legislation and regulations of the *Children's Protection Act 1993 (SA)* and in particular, the Aboriginal Placement Principle. FSA removal rates of Aboriginal children are extremely concerning as reflected in our legal case work which has dramatically increased since the Chloe Valentine and baby Ebony coronial inquests. ALRM is concerned of the high number of 'knee jerk' removals taking place and further alarmed that FSA appears to be more focused on their credibility and taking risk adverse action for fear of being scrutinised.

Since the coronial inquests, it appears there are blanket removals occurring at an alarming rate. FSA alleged that they are under resourced yet continue to place children in situations which is inadequate and unacceptable. ALRM strongly recommends FSA reinstate and support to fully resource the Aboriginal After Hours Emergency Response Team Yaitya Tirramangkotti to ensure Aboriginal children who are deemed to be at risk, are culturally supported to lessen the traumatic impact of being removed from their family, their cultural and community environment.

ALRM calls for increased Aboriginal Family Response Teams be created to work in partnership with families who are at risk of having their children removed. ALRM suggests that if FSA have so many vacancies that FSA should dedicate at least half of those vacant positions to creating a number of Aboriginal Family Response Teams taken into consideration of the alarmingly high numbers of Aboriginal children currently in state care. ALRM remains critical of FSA and continue to question why there are 200 vacancies within FSA, is this due to the fact that they are unable to fill these position or are they unwilling to do so?

Yours sincerely,

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