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Submission to the Green Paper

Submitter: Child Matters

Introduction and Executive Summary Only

For information on Child Matters' full submission, contact
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The Green Paper states that the Government is but one player in protecting vulnerable children and repeatedly asks how it can support others to share that responsibility. It is not the responsibility of Government to solve this problem alone.

This submission outlines why, and how strengthening the regulatory environment, alongside improving sector competence will ensure all New Zealanders take responsibility for keeping our children safe. The Government has a critical role to play in delivering effective solutions that do make a difference for children – but it should be a partnership with all those who have a role in protecting vulnerable children..

Introduction

In every aspect of protecting vulnerable children, effective, comprehensive, interagency training supported by robust child protection policies, is paramount.

Whether the objective of the Government's Green Paper is to improve the safety of children, better sharing of information, effecting policy changes, or better response to children at risk, Child Matters believes that success depends on three key factors;

1. a competent workforce
2. a community that knows how to look out for its children
3. Parents who understand how to keep their children safe.

Child Matters strongly believes that Government policy needs to move from dealing with child abuse to preventing child abuse, and from treating the urgent and vocal to eliminating the causes.

With large numbers of vulnerable children in New Zealand 'upstream ' or preventative services are key to making a difference .

Evidence demonstrates that one indicator of the best practice in child protection is a mix of services¹, and that a priority should be placed on prevention services working well together. In order to make these services effective staff **must** be properly trained.

The Government has identified four key areas where it would like to do more. Child Matters responds to these four areas in this Submission.

Executive Summary:

New Zealand will not protect vulnerable children if we do not provide effective, universal child protection education that is backed up by strong organisational child protection policies.

Child Matters believes that the best interventions, collaborations, services or protocols will only succeed in keeping children safe if those carrying them out are equipped to do so.

The Government cannot achieve its desired goals and eliminate the causes of child abuse on its own, but can show leadership in requiring basic standards and skill levels of those involved with children.

This will require legislation changes coupled with effective regulation that is both agreed to and supported across relevant government agencies.

Child abuse will only be eliminated when every adult has the knowledge and ability to recognise the warnings signs and the confidence to take action. It should be a national requirement that professionals working with children whether in education, health, social services or sport, be required to undertake some form of training.

Child Matters supports an action plan that includes:

- Parents and caregivers with vulnerable children to be given access to workshops and programmes that teach about child abuse prevention
- Communities to be given access to child abuse prevention programmes as it takes more than just one person to raise a child
- The Vulnerable Children's Action Plan should include the goal of having all frontline public sector workers who have direct contact with children undertake child abuse prevention training
- Legislation to state clearly that all professionals who have direct contact with children are required to undertake child abuse prevention training
- Whānau, hapū, iwi and Māori leaders should have child abuse prevention programmes and workshop services available within their communities
- Government should reprioritise spending to provide child abuse prevention programmes and professional development and set high standards for skills in child protection work

¹ Nett, Spratt, Blomfield, Heitamaki Kindlert and Ponnert 2011, in press

- Improving the workforce for children can only be achieved by equipping those professionals with the right tools to identify and prevent child abuse
- All organisations and individuals contracting services to the government and in receipt of government funding are required to have an approved child protection policy and give evidence that it is being followed
- Government should consider the provision of an independent child protection help-line.

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