



Speech 10 September 2015

NAPCAN Play Your Part Awards 2015

Good morning.

Thank you Lesley for your introduction. I thank the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect for once again inviting me to be a part of this important event and thank Anglicare WA for hosting us today.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today.

Many of you here today are familiar with the role of Commissioner for Children and Young People.

Broadly speaking, the role of Commissioner is to promote and monitor the wellbeing of the more than 585,000 children and young people in WA and advocate for whatever is in their best interests.

In doing so I have to have particular regard for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and those who may be disadvantaged or vulnerable for some reason.

Guiding principles under the Commissioner for Children and Young People Act are that:

- Children and young people are entitled to live in a caring and nurturing environment, protected from harm and exploitation
- Their contributions to the community should be recognised for their value and merit
- Their views on all matters affecting them should be given serious consideration and taken into account

Parents, families and communities have the primary role in safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of their children and young people and should be supported in carrying out this role.

This is the second year I have attended the NAPCAN Play Your Part Awards and I am again heartened to see the many dedicated people who are working to prevent the abuse of our children and young people.

National Child Protection Week is a reminder that one of the most basic premises of our society is that children and young people have the right to be safe and protected from abuse or exploitation.

This is reliant on a caring and aware community – for us to all play our part.

One way in which we can safeguard our children and young people is to have robust processes and policies within organisations working with children and young people to ensure the highest standards of care.

Two years ago the Australian Children’s Commissioners and Guardians Group endorsed a set of principles for child safety in organisations.

These 11 principles revolve around a preventative, proactive and participatory approach to child safety.

In the last year I have worked together with other agencies, including Anglicare, to build on these principles through gaining a better understanding of how Western Australia is faring in creating child-safe environments.

As a part of this, we consulted with 365 children and young people, aged between four and 18 years, about what helps them to feel safe when they are participating in organisations or activities outside of home.

This included asking them what they need organisations to do to ensure that they can raise their concerns about feeling unsafe.

What this consultation found is that not being taken seriously remains a significant concern for children and young people in feeling comfortable about raising problems with adults.

Given that in their view they only raise matters that are serious, it is important adults respond appropriately to any matter of concern raised by a child or young person, no matter how insignificant it may seem, as often this is what creates the possibility of discussing more distressing problems or concerns at another time.

The children and young people were also asked what strategies they would recommend for a child or young person who is feeling unsafe or uncomfortable when engaging with an organisation.

There are clear messages for organisations in the views of children and young people:

- having friendly and engaged staff who like children
- being proactively asked their views, and having them taken seriously
- being given choice and having flexibility around participating in activities
- having information about expectations and clear rules of behaviour, and

- seeing action taken to stop problems from continuing.

Having the right staff was critical to participants – they have to be approachable, friendly, trustworthy, competent and enthusiastic.

And, as one child told us, “You also need a mix of personalities. Like you don’t want every supervisor to be the same. Like artsy, smarty, nerdy, funny – it’s like lollies you want a good variety – jubes, toffee, chocolate etc.”

The report of this consultation is now available and it is my aim that the views expressed in it inspire and inform organisations to continue to work towards improving the quality and safety of services they provide.

This issue of safety and the importance of community was also reflected in my recent consultation with Aboriginal children and young people.

In the last year, more than 1,200 Aboriginal children and young people shared their views with me on a range of issues, including what is important to them, the strengths and challenges in their lives and their hopes for the future.

Overwhelmingly, family and community was key to the majority of these children. This, I should add, matches what I hear from non-Aboriginal children.

The consultations highlighted the important roles many Aboriginal children and young people play in their family and communities, and how they are working towards a positive future.

Feeling safe and secure was a prominent feature of the consultations, with many children and young people said they valued living in communities where they felt safe.

However, comments such as “I want [to] be in a safe place” from an 11 year-old girl in the Kimberley, “[My town] isn’t safe” from a 12 year-old in Perth and “The children of [my town] are exposed to things that they should not be, such as drugs and alcohol, family abuse, sexual abuse, verbal and physical abuse” from a 17 year-old girl in the Pilbara, indicate that we need to do more to protect the most vulnerable members of our community.

These comments were published in the reports on the consultation, and I have taken these voices direct to Parliament and to the government and non-government organisations who work with children and young people.

One organisation that exemplifies the sentiment “Play Your Part” is our host today, Anglicare WA.

Anglicare WA has a close and long-term working relationship with my office so I take great pleasure in announcing that Anglicare WA is the Western Australian recipient of the 2015 Play Your Part Award for Inspiring Prevention Initiatives, for their commitment to a child safe organisation strategy.

I would like to commend the staff of Anglicare WA for their willingness to share their learnings and help others to improve in this area.

Today's award is not only a recognition of this great work being done to help protect children, but it is also a reminder to us all that far too many children and young people need protection, and that we must all play our part.

I would now like to call on representatives from Anglicare WA to receive their award.

Please join me in congratulating everyone at Anglicare WA for their commitment to a child safe organisation strategy.