

MEDIA RELEASE

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Children's Commissioner's 2014-2015 Annual Report

The NT Children's Commissioner, Ms Colleen Gwynne, is pleased to report the release of her 2014-15 Annual Report. The report provides an overview of the performance of the statutory functions and activities conducted by the Office of the Children's Commissioner.

The child protection system continues to receive an increasing number of notifications for suspected abuse or neglect of children. The notifications increased from 12,933 in 2013-14 to 17,032 in 2014-15, which is a 32 percent increase. The number of investigations being commenced have also increased substantially from 4,900 to 7,091 since the previous year (45 percent increase). The increase in notifications has been on-going for the past five years whilst the number of investigations has only experienced increases in the past two years.

The increase in both notifications and investigations is placing resourcing pressure on the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to effectively deal with the reported risks of children in our community. This is evidenced by the increasing number of unallocated and overdue investigations that existed as at 30 June 2015 which was 1,301 up from the numbers from 30 June 2014 of 1,160. Overall completion rates for investigations for the 28 day and 62 time-frames have dropped substantially in the past two years.

The total number of children in out-of-home care was as at 30 June 2015 was 997 which is an increase from 30 June 2014 of 923. The increase in number is due to fewer children leaving care during 2014-15 (257) compared to the number entering care (335). The number of children entering this system is at a five year low, which does not equate to the increased child protection activity and substantiations of abuse or neglect over the past two years.

This is the first year the Children's Commissioner has reported on substantiated harm or exploitation cases of children in the out-of-home care system (abuse in care). In total there were 110 substantiated cases of abuse in care involving 95 children in 2014-15. This is substantially higher than the numbers of cases that DCF had previously reported to the Children's Commissioner.

The report also contains the results of a number of child protection practice reviews conducted by the Office of the Children's Commissioner. The quality of care plans that were reviewed has largely been very similar to the results experienced in 2013-14 when there were substantial improvements. There have been reductions in the percentages of children that had face to face contact with a caseworker within one and two months from the review date. The review also highlighted need for improved planning for children who are preparing to leave care. The lack of accommodation options for young people who are leaving care remains a concern. The Children's Commissioner said "When a young person in care turns 18, just like in every other family and more so because of some of the experiences these young people have been through, they need support to transition to adulthood. It is clear to me that the system is struggling to meet these needs, particularly finding suitable accommodation with a large number of them accessing homelessness services."

For more information contact Adam Harwood on: 8999 6076. The Annual Report is located at <http://www.childrenscommissioner.nt.gov.au/publications.html>

