Centre for Excellence
in Child and Family Welfare Inc.

Media release

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Minister must be open on why community services fail

A doorstop media interview given today by community services minister Mary Wooldridge has raised serious questions regarding the potential closure of an unspecified number of community organisations providing child and family services for vulnerable Victorians.

The minister failed to rule out further closures following her announcement in the interview that Orana Family Services would not continue to be funded by the Department of Human Services following a service review by the department.

Orana is a member of the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, the peak body for nearly 100 child and family services in Victoria.

Centre chief executive, Dr Lynette Buoy, said the minister's announcement risked creating the false perception that poor practice was rife in the sector, and could be solved simply by closing services claimed to be under-performing.

"Because we're working with vulnerable children and young people, the need for accountability of these services is beyond question.

"However, greater transparency is needed in judging their performance to ensure that the services aren't being held accountable for policy, resourcing and decisions about the State care system that are the primary responsibility of government," Dr Lynette Buoy said today.

The current Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry has received many written and verbal submissions describing a substantially under-resourced State care system facing an increasing number of more complex cases, with a reduced capacity to intervene earlier in the lives of vulnerable children and young people to prevent abuse and neglect before they occur.

"If the minister is serious about building a better system, she will allow a full and public accounting of all the reasons why services sometimes fail. She should also make clear if the closure of not-for-profit services is paving the way for the introduction of commercial providers who see vulnerability as a profit opportunity," Dr Buoy said.

The introduction of for-profit community service providers is an option canvassed in the terms of reference of the Inquiry, which is set to report to the minister and to Parliament on 4 November.

“You can’t protect young lives on a shoestring unless you’re willing to face far greater economic and human costs down the track. That’s the question for this minister,” Dr Buoy concluded.

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