

15 January 2019

## Media Release

### ‘State of the Family’

#### What will it take to ‘*Turn the Curve*’ for the most Vulnerable Children in SA?

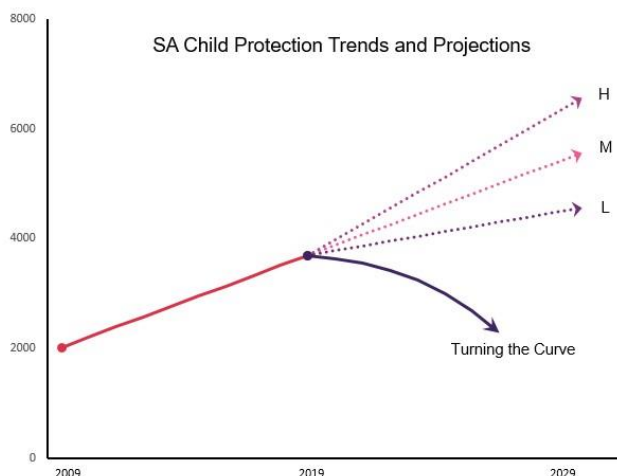
The number of children entering State Care has doubled in the last 10 years

In 2009 there were 2000 children and young people in State Care but sadly, at the end of 2019, that number leaped to over 4000.

How long can this tragic trend be allowed to continue before we review State policies invoke new initiatives and mobilise resources in a way that will turn the curve?

Surely the care of SA’s most vulnerable children and young people is a matter of significance that warrants a high priority public response. Children are waking up each day in perilous family circumstances and, truth be told, the current policies, strategies and resourcing levels that guide and underpin our State’s collective efforts to address the crisis have been found wanting. Clearly there is an urgent need but what is to be done?

The mandate of the new Child and Family Support System and the initial co-design work being led by new Community and Support Services Directorate are promising steps forward. Along with input from community organisations and other stakeholders this work is casting an aspirational agenda for change... but will it adequately resourced?



There is a prevailing concern that the State Government may not have fully grasped the moral imperative, economic benefits, and strength of community sentiment associated with achieving better outcomes for our State’s most vulnerable children.

The fact that the number of children in State Care has doubled compared to a decade ago, and an unwavering upward trend prevails, there is due cause to be extremely concerned.

As a community, we see and count the growing cost of failure to implement effective targeted supports and intensive interventions with families who are struggling to raise children under compounding layers of adversity. SA has the opportunity to draw upon leading international approaches such as Child Friendly Leads in UK and in New Zealand that demonstrate that systemic change is not only possible, but achievable in just a few years following commitment to make change.

Our community is good at reporting child abuse (via the Child Abuse Report Line (on 131478) but not enough service responses are available. Increased investment into

Targeted Family Support services including Family Group Conferences would enable struggling parents, such as parents who are young and/or dealing with complex issues in their own lives, to be provided with timely support. Assertive case management by specialist family workers can often avert the need for at risk children to be removed and placed into State Care.

I encourage readers to listen to a recent 30 min Broadcast on BBC Radio titled 'Cradle to Care' by Nigel Richardson, a globally recognised leader in Child and Family interventions: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000bb6w>

Clearly, we must review our policies, implement new initiatives, mobilise appropriate resources and better align our efforts if we are to '*turn the curve*' and arrest the current trend.

Given that it's been over 3 years since the Royal Commission Report titled '*The Life they Deserve*' was handed down, I urge the State Government to strategically increase investment to strengthen these high risk families and keep children safe, thus averting the need for children to be removed.

The 2020 State Budget provides another tangible opportunity to (at least) bring our State's investment into strengthening families and communities into alignment with that of other States. If we don't, we continue to pay the high and escalating cost of having more children living under State Guardianship anyway... not a great outcome for children, families nor the public purse.

I look forward to the day when South Australia is recognised nationally and around the globe as '*The State of the Family*'... *a great place to raise a family, thrive and prosper together*.

**For further information, please contact Graham Brown, CEO, Baptist Care SA on 0417 823 523.**

## **About Baptist Care SA**

Baptist Care SA provides out of home care, disability care, youth education and employment, and homelessness and therapeutic support services.

Established in 1913, Baptist Care SA currently has over 1,200 dedicated staff and volunteers who work tirelessly to help South Australians achieve their full potential.

Baptist Care SA is committed to working with the state's most disadvantaged, championing local issues and connecting with people to enable positive change. Learn more about Baptist Care SA at [www.baptistcaresa.org.au](http://www.baptistcaresa.org.au).