

CHILD MATTERS – speaking up for children

Child Matters is New Zealand's specialist child protection education organisation

White Paper a huge step forward

By **RACHEL MCGUIRE**

The White paper for Vulnerable Children released on October 11, has incorporated numerous initiatives which Child Matters has been strongly advocating for since its inception in 1994.

We are excited to see many of these initiatives finally being prioritised at a Government level.

Following are some of the key areas of the White Paper which Child Matters believes deserve particular mention:

The introduction of an independent 'Child Protect' phone line is to be commended. From Child Matters' experience, there is a definite need and demand for a line like this. Every week Child Matters fields a significant number of unsolicited calls from people who are concerned about a child but don't know what to do.

The Government's introduction of compulsory child abuse policies for agencies working with children provides a pivotal piece of the puzzle in eliminating child abuse.

Organisations will be in a much stronger position to protect children if they have clear guidelines on how their organisation will go about minimising the risk of abuse to children in their care, and what actions to



CEO Anthea Simcock

take if abuse is suspected.

The compulsory training of professionals working with children in recognising and responding to child abuse is a critical factor and it's exciting to see this included in the White Paper. Child Protection Training has a significant impact in safeguarding children. It provides people with the skills to know what signs of abuse to look for, the knowledge to know what to do if worried about a child, and the tools and confidence to take appropriate action to keep children safe.

Child Matters supports the stance that the Social Development Minister Paula Bennett has taken in regards to not requiring mandatory reporting of child abuse. There are

pros and cons for and against mandatory reporting, and the fact that the Minister is requiring child protection training will ensure that those working with children will be able to exercise professional judgement around reporting.

The new national vetting and screening process that will be set out in law is very welcome. Children can be extremely vulnerable when unsafe people are allowed to enter organisations. While a national screening and vetting process could be extremely effective, organisations will still need to take personal responsibility for ensuring that the people they employ are safe.

Overseas research carried out by Child Matters shows that other countries have successfully implemented minimum workforce standards for those working with children and the White Paper focus in this area ensures that we are in keeping with international practices. The cross-agency care response being developed, which has an information sharing database and requires the joint responsibility of key government departments, is a huge step in the right direction. This can be further enhanced by these professionals and agencies training together so Child Matters' hopes that this is also considered.

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