

Specialist child trauma support is vital

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Australian Childhood Foundation chief executive Joe Tucci said nearly 700 Tasmanian children and young people had engaged with the service since 2009.

TASMANIAN foster parent Judy says having access to specialised trauma services for two young children in her care has been an incredible relief and source of support.

A report released yesterday revealed Tasmanian children experiencing stress, abuse and trauma has surged amid increasing parental drug and alcohol misuse and parental mental illness.

The spike was particularly prevalent in the North and North-West of the state, the Australian Childhood Foundation found.

Extremely high levels of emotional abuse, neglect and family violence were common among the cohort.

Judy said the effect of these issues on the children placed in her care was immediately obvious.

“When the children first came to me there were high levels of stress and anxiety manifested in anger and self-harm, not trusting anyone in the world and feeling very sad,” she said.

“Being extremely angry about issues, self-harming a lot, a lot of door-slamming and swearing, and also a lot of nightmares, bed wetting and feeling like life is not worth living.”

Judy said the history of trauma impacted the children’s schooling and social lives, which were slowly being addressed through counselling and support provided by the Australian Childhood Foundation.

Foundation chief executive Joe Tucci said nearly 700 Tasmanian children and young people had engaged with the service since 2009, among them receiving 14,000 therapeutic sessions and 2500 professional meetings.

Dr Tucci estimated at least three times that number of Tasmanian children needed the service but were unable to access it, due to the limited number of counsellors across the state and levels of government funding.

“Kids who don’t get specialist counselling are going to continue to carry that trauma with them into their adolescence and adult life and the community will pay for that,” he said.

Dr Tucci wants funding to the ACF continued and increased, with state government funding for the ACF drying up at the end of the financial year.

But Human Services Minister Jacqui Petrusma said the services the ACF provides are the subject of a tender process, for a five-year period beyond July 1 next year.

A request for proposals from prospective providers of sibling group care, residential care and therapeutic services was released last month and closes this Friday.

“Tasmania’s out-of-home care system has grown over the last few years resulting in a system that is not completely coordinated and has lacked a strategic plan for its future,” Ms Petrusma said.

“In 2014, the whole out-of-home care service system – our family based care, our residential care and our therapeutic supports – has been the focus of a significant reform agenda which is currently the focus of the first phase of this tender.”