Date:

The Hon. Kate Washington, MP

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Dear Kate

How are you?  I am writing to express my disappointment in you, the Department of Communities and Justice and NSW Health. Your inaction and failure to support Dalwood Spilstead Service has resulted in 100s of young families losing their village at Dalwood.

These vulnerable children are at risk of being left without the care and resources they desperately need. You and your management team’s ability to sweep this under the table is astounding.

As I am sure you are aware in the realm of child welfare, the importance of consistent support for at-risk children and families cannot be overstated.

According to the Department of Community and Justice, their/your recommissioning process involves focusing on weekly home visits for the most vulnerable, at-risk children and families. This raises concerns about isolation and short-sighted cost-cutting measures.

Consensus and public opinion believe ***“It takes a village to raise a child.”*** Moreover, with the decline of familial and societal support structures, parents are increasingly burdened with the responsibility of navigating the complexities of child-rearing alone.

In all other areas of health and well-being, the focus is on a multidisciplinary team, whether that is in hip surgery, stroke treatment and rehabilitation etc. Why would one imagine that reducing a service to just one case management session per week for the most vulnerable children and parents could be effective?

These children and families require a multi-disciplinary approach with DCJ, Health and Education working together and pooling resources to create a service for this population.

The most frustrating part of this issue is that this already exists in the Dalwood Spilstead Model. Despite all the evidence, the Spilstead Model has not been picked up by government leaders despite research, advocacy, and positive outcomes this service provides. These reasons include but not limited to

1. Based in Northern Sydney families must have a lower level of need.
2. It must be more expensive.
3. It’s not scalable.
4. The research doesn’t include randomized control trials (RCTs.).
5. It doesn’t fit nicely into one government department.

All these excuses have been refuted:

1. Referrals from DCJ around NSW are screened for the same level of risk, therefore level of family need is independently assessed and uniform around the state.
2. The cost effectiveness has been demonstrated over many years and relates to:
   1. Monetization of staff retention.
   2. Critical mass of clients accessing programs.
   3. Reduced brokerage for private services and therapies.
3. The model has been replicated elsewhere – successfully for 10 years.
4. Professor Ted Melhuish, leading expert from Oxford University explained during his review of the model in 2014 that due to the extensive research around the world outlining the clear negative trajectory of the children referred any positive change in direction because of intervention is understood as evidence based. He finalized his review by stating that “there would appear to be a powerful case for extending the Dalwood Spilstead model more widely across NSW, and indeed Australia.”
5. Government silos are well understood to be less productive and effective.

This snub is being repeated (again) with you just released your Redesigning Family Preservation in NSW discussion paper.

***Why isn’t the DSS model which has been locally designed, researched, and internationally acclaimed as world’s best practice not been included as one of the recommended models to be considered for the new look DCJ service across the state?***

Why are you disregarding an evidence-based model at their doorstep in preference for programs trialled overseas.

*Instead of being ROLLED BACK, the Dalwood Spilstead Service model needs to be ROLLED OUT!!!*

Furthermore, your department DCJ is claiming no responsibility for the loss of funding for Dalwood Spilstead Service despite recognising its effectiveness. In fact, the team feel they are not “in a position” to question the decision or process to end the subcontracting arrangements between TBS and NSW Health.

I disagree with this. As you may already know according to the Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission areas outside their responsibility include.

1. ***Contractual disputes between a charity and other organisations or individuals***
   * *This includes tenders and purchases. Other government departments and agencies often look at this issue.*
2. ***Quality of services a charity provides.***
   * *The agency you need to contact to raise a concern will be different depending on the services being provided.*
   * *For example, if you have concerns about how a charity provides health services you can contact your state or territory Health Services Commission.*

<https://www.acnc.gov.au/raise-concern/concerns-about-charities/what-acnc-cannot-investigate>

As such it is DCJ and your is responsibility for the contracting to The Benevolent Society and subcontracting to NSLHD.  Therefore, it is DCJ’s and your responsibility to look further into this matter and rectify the situation.

DCJ and you have failed to:

* Involve appropriate persons in the recommissioning process (e.g. DSS managers and community members)
* invite us to the “we heard you” meeting,
* acknowledge the impressive results the DSS has when compared to the rest of the state,
* acknowledge that other NGOs often say they cannot accept more complex cases as they do not have the appropriate skills and that Dalwood accepts all cases.
* hear that clients of the service wish to stay with DSS and wish to ensure future vulnerable children and families have access to this service not a sub-par service.
* Research adequately best practice.

Existing families wish to remain under the very successful and internationally proven Spilstead Model and demand that future families to have access to this service not the service currently being offered by The Benevolent Society

**I do not feel the current decisions the DCJ, The Benevolent Society and NSLHD have made are in the family and communities’ best interest.**

**I suggest moving forward:**

1. Immediate return to the pre-existing model while further conversations during this recommissioning process can continue.
2. Return to referrals from DCJ to Dalwood
3. Continued subcontracting via Benevolent till 2025. If not to allow during this time to have an extraordinary agreement that payment for this service will come directly from DCJ to Dalwood Auxiliary Charity rather than The Benevolent Society. The Auxiliary Charity will ensure 100% of the grant will go towards vulnerable children.
4. Apply the DCJ suggestions “*The extension period will enable full recommissioning activities including co-design and testing of future program design”, which will include the Dalwood Spilstead Service*
5. That DCJ engages community (including the parents in action group at Dalwood) in their decision-making process during the review of the Brighter Futures Program so that people with lived experiences can ensure their needs are being met and to improve transparency of process.
6. And independent audit of the recommissioning process and why NGOs with a completion rate of 30% are continuing to be given new/ongoing contracts despite such poor results.
7. Formation of a trust/board to manage the future of Dalwood (the land) to ensure all future uses are for the at risk, vulnerable children, and families of NSW.

Together, let us stand in solidarity and ensure that no child is left behind. Our collective voices have the power to enact meaningful change and create a brighter future for all.

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Regards