

## Children, Young People and Families

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The Plan to rebuild essential services

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*“What parents and NGO staff wanted was earlier intervention and support to assist families to address problems and stay together ... prior to any contact with the child protection system”.*

[Social Action and Research Centre, Anglicare Tasmania, 2013].

## The Liberal Plan for Children, Young People and Families

The Liberal Plan for Children, Young People and Families is focused on ensuring that all children have every opportunity to be healthy, happy and well-educated – to grow, thrive, live, work and raise their own families in Tasmania.

**We recognise that raising children is one of the most important jobs in the world, and that in order to protect children, we must support families.**

The Labor-Green Government has failed to act decisively on the recommendations of over 15 reports into the child protection system, including a Parliamentary Inquiry which found that *“children are falling through the gaps”*.

The Liberals understand that significant reform is still very much needed in Tasmania to deliver better outcomes for children, young people and families.

### **Invest \$300,000 into short-term, preventative support care, to help keep families together**

The Liberals will pilot this early intervention support care model which will allow for the short-term respite care of children while intensive support is provided to families to address risks to children.

It will help avoid children being taken into the statutory child protection system, while parents get the support needed to keep their family together. It will also help ensure parents do not lose family and parenting payments while accessing support, plunging them into financial instability.

### **Invest \$360,000 into a Pre-Placement Centre**

Around 100 children will come into care for the first time each year in Southern Tasmania, and around 50 per cent can be placed with family or kinship carers. An Auditor-General report found foster placement decisions were more likely to be based on availability of carers instead of careful matching to a child’s needs.

**The Liberals will invest \$360,000 over three years into trialling a new home-style Pre-Placement Centre for children coming into care for the first time, in the south of the State.**

This Centre will provide immediate therapeutic, proactive and responsive care, including trauma counselling, honest age-appropriate information for children, early health and needs assessments, and effective placement planning. Importantly, and if appropriate, it will ensure links are retained with parents if there is a likelihood of reunification, and priority will be given to a child’s existing schooling, friendships and sport. This Centre will help reduce trauma for children and reduce placement breakdown.

## For all families

A majority Hodgman Liberal Government will increase the range of support available on the ground, in local communities and through our schools, by -

- Investing **\$4.4 million into a new contemporary school health nurse model** - a proven model of primary health care and early intervention;
- Strengthening the legislative provisions that deal with the **crime of bullying and cyber bullying**;
- Providing **certainty of tenure to child care centres attached to Government schools**, for parents, schools and child care operators;
- **Protecting children from sexual assault by providing \$800,000 to Bravehearts** to deliver their child safety awareness program in all Tasmanian primary schools;
- Legislating for minimum mandatory sentences for those convicted of serious sexual offences against children;
- Identifying support for young people with problem sexualised behaviours and sex offending;
- Reviewing the protective measures that Police are able to take to help parents and young people when **young teenagers run away** from home;
- Develop a **targeted Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy** with the Youth Network of Tasmania **as part of a \$3 million commitment**;
- Provide an additional **\$40,000 over four years for the Tasmanian Youth Conference**;
- Invest **\$360,000 into a three year Youth Employment Partnership**;
- Provide **\$1.35 million** in a partnership with the Beacon Foundation to **help 1500 students stay in education, become job ready or to get a job**;
- Invest **\$53 million** into education and creating a job-ready generation, including extra literacy and numeracy teachers;
- Undertake an **independent review of the supports for students with a disability** in the school system; and
- Provide **\$1 million for a new continuum of care for children with autism**.

## For families who are struggling

A majority Hodgman Liberal Government recognises that sometimes there is no choice but to remove children from harm's way, but this should not be the easy option, and only as a last resort. We want to provide help as early as possible to provide every chance for families to stay together, by –

- Committing to continue Tasmania's **family support services and the family support gateway**;

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- A **new hand-up approach to families with complex needs** in partnership with the community sector;
- Developing a **Vulnerable Babies and Infants Strategy** as babies under 12 months are more likely to be the subject of a child protection report; and
- Allocating five family homes from the public housing pool to **assist families where homelessness is putting children at risk**, so that children are not removed from parents for reasons of parental homelessness.

### For children at serious risk, and in State care

A majority Hodgman Liberal Government will commit to taking decisive action to protect children, while ensuring children in the care of the State have the best level of care. We will also –

- Develop clear **guidelines for the investigation and referral of alleged child abuse** in cases where the notifications are from professionals including police, teachers and health professionals;
- Work with police to minimise the trauma for **children being removed from parents under a warrant**;
- Ensure **child abusers are prosecuted to the full extent of the law** by tasking the Sentencing Advisory Council to investigate the prosecution rates of parents who seriously assault and abuse children;
- Provide a **greater oversight role for the Commissioner of Children** as per the recommendations of a recent review; and
- Establish an independent process to review **child death and serious injury**;

### For families who are dealing with the statutory child protection system

A recent report by Anglicare found that parents' experience of their engagement with child protection is often disapproving, degrading and exclusionary. A majority Hodgman Liberal Government will –

- **Review all practice guidelines** to incorporate clear and transparent decision-making processes, that involve parents from the beginning, ensuring clarity about goals and timelines, providing a culture that gives every opportunity for families to stay together and, if children are removed, providing clarity about the changes families need to make to assist with reunification.

### For child protection workers

In 2006, there were 600 children in Care. In December 2013, this had grown to 1086, and the projections are that around 1400 children will be in the statutory child protection system by 2017. We need to stop the trajectory of more children coming into care by working more proactively with at-risk families.

A majority Hodgman Liberal Government wants Tasmania to lead the nation in best practice by ensuring workers are well-resourced and feel valued and supported in one of the hardest jobs by –

- Gradually introducing a **new model of child protection that will provide greater back-up and support to workers**, by creating small child protection teams who work together for a group of families or children. This collaborative approach to decision-making will have an emphasis on values-based and respectful practice. In the UK this model has resulted in a 50 per cent reduction in staff sickness, a reduction in the bureaucratic burden, a 40 per cent reduction in children going into care, and better consistency and continuity of care; and
- Provide for a more **transparent and robust process for complaints in care** investigation.

## For kinship carers, grandparent carers and foster carers

A majority Hodgman Liberal Government recognises and values those who step in to care for children who cannot live at home, and will provide greater support and respect for their vital role. Unless we do this, we will continue to lose more foster carers than we can recruit.

We will also –

- Investigate measures that will allow for **earlier consideration of long-term permanent placements for children who cannot return home** and are on long-term Orders, to enable positive lifetime relationships for the child;
- Establish a **transparent mechanism to support children in care with complex care needs**, to ensure a responsive, consistent and independent assessment process for the approval of extra financial help for children who need it; and
- Work cooperatively with the **Foster Carers Association of Tasmania** to assist the organisation in its goal of becoming a modern, responsive organisation that supports and advocates for foster carers, while prioritising improvements in the relationship between Child Protection Services and foster carers.

### Costings:

\$700,000 (all other initiatives previously announced and costed).

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