

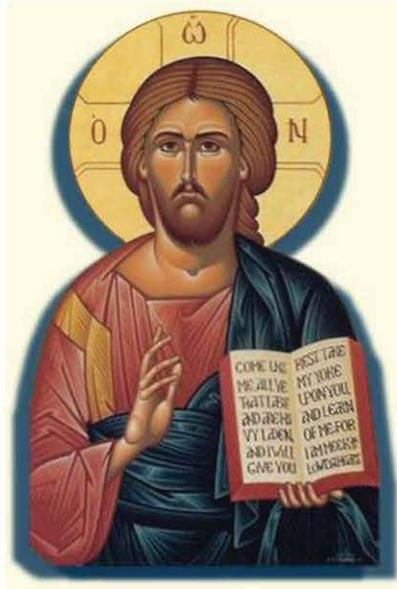
Andrew Lockwood-Penney

***Protecting Victoria's
Vulnerable Children
Inquiry***

Public submission

" Without Prejudice "

2011



Andrew Lockwood-Penney.

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Also included are Word Format and Pdf format electronic versions.

Dedicated to the incarnate Christ of God

“ In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. And the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth ”.

The Gospel according to John.

The other side of the issue of Child protection.

There is another side of the Child protection debate. Recent government inquiry's and media attention has focused upon the lack of or non-existence of Child protection measures.

The debate also needs to focus upon the times that Child protection intervention violates the rights of parents and children, the family structure, and the role of the child protection authority in relation to working with family's, and not against the family unit as a whole.

The statement of "protecting the child's interests", should always be viewed within the context of the individual situation. It is understood that the Child's interests and well-being should always be maximised at all times, however that rule of law, or rule of operation, at times can, and is, manipulated for various degrees and purposes.

This statement, as an ideology, is manipulated by both Child protection workers, and in some cases the Children themselves.

Numerous examples can be found in orders currently before and previously decided actions within the family & Children's court, especially in Melbourne.

An example can be found with teenagers, mostly girls, between the ages of 13 and 16, manipulating the system, providing false, or highly exaggerated reports or statements about domestic abuse, or living conditions, to either engage parents in battles against each other, have a parent that the teenager is resisting authority removed altogether, or to be able to be removed out of the family home, to engage in undisciplined activities, including unlimited social time with friends or boyfriends.

It's a manipulation that most Child protection workers, due to both stupidity, and inexperience, cannot see through, or recognise, resulting in, because of the "child's best interests" taking action within the family unit, indulging the teenagers claims, resulting in unnecessary family intervention, and false, or miss-leading accusations that the parents are accountable to.

In most cases it takes months of intervention for the truth to emerge, as the parents, in the first instance are not believed, because of such things as the father being perceived as abusive and angry and the mother being perceived as unconcerned that there is issues.

Many child protection workers for example, claim that parents cannot restrict teenagers lives, as they have rights, and don't seem to have many obligations. Parents must not control behaviour, or activities, but then, do a complete turn-around and claim, for example, if a teenage daughter becomes pregnant, then parents are fully responsible, as a result of an activity, or behaviour, that they are restricted from trying to control, or manage, in the first instance.

If one of the aims is to, by this inquiry, ensure a ‘ workforce that delivers services of a high quality to children and families ’, is it not time that the states Human services, or child protection, had in place guidelines for the recruitment of staff, not that there is not any already in place, but one must consider the protocols in place for the recruitment of child protection workers in relation to experience.

There is instances where recruitment takes place of workers that are near graduates of university courses with little ‘ Life experience’.

What I mean by this is that Child protection workers need to understand how the world works socially.

In Australia, it’s important that one understands our social construct’s and processors in family groups, individual behaviours, cultural customs, and religious beliefs, if any, that family’s may hold, because these processors have a large impact on the family structure, and how that family operates in the real world, and how it identifies itself with that world, and how it identifies with itself.

New graduates cannot possibly have or retain this knowledge unless they were widely read, or of gifted intellect, which is not common as these graduates always preferred the more mainstream or private sectors where financial rewards become the priority for one’s career.

Best Interest Policy can be used by teenagers to manipulate the system, as previously discussed.

Section 8(3) of the *Children, Young persons and their family’s act 1997* (TAS) states the following (And I use this here as an example, the various states have similar wording):

‘ In any exercise of powers under this act in relation to a child, if a child is able to form and express views as to his or her ongoing care and protection, those views must be sought and given serious consideration, taking into account the child’s age and maturity ’.

This is where teenagers can manipulate the system, the problem is that each states wording cannot be changed in order to protect, at all costs, the wellbeing of much younger children. This situation can be solved by, as previously discussed, the recruitment of a more mature age worker, with both professional qualifications and life skills to deal with abuse of young children, without question under the wording within the act, but also with older teenagers, be able to discern fact from fiction.

Victorian Ombudsman George Brouwer criticised Victorian Child Protection practices under the management and guidance of Human Services Victoria.

He states:

‘ It was unlikely that the department would be able to meet expected demands in the system even in the short or the long term ‘.

What does this mean for Victorian Child Protection?

Does it mean that his investigation will be considered by the government and funding for Human services recruitment and training will be increased, or is the advice being considered in theory only, resulting in, practical terms, no extra staff employed to cope with the expected demands, or current staff working under stress and duress struggling to cope, suffering from overwork and burnout, not to mention any overtime of actual working hours.

The financial costs and the physical costs to Child protection staff cannot be in line with proper practice. The Financial costs of such operations would be better spent on extra staff, also at the same time eliminating the psychical and emotional costs of the Child protection workers themselves.

The problem we see here is that the welfare of children will be at risk under the popular management of economic rationalism, if these important matters are not logically debated or even acknowledged, in the first instance.

Mr Brouwer also said the department’s central policy documents governing how allegations of abuse and neglect should be dealt with, remained in draft form between 2007 & 2010. He said the guidelines were finalised only after he began his investigation.

This is clearly unacceptable.

This shows a government department not accountable for its actions or administration in any way in regards to policy, operations, or quality control as a public service.

A department that only acts when forced to act, or only implements processor’s when at critical stages. This shows an ethos of management of problems, but not a solution to problems.

Thanking You.

Andrew Lockwood-Penney.

References

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