

Embargoed until 18 August 2017

MEDIA RELEASE

Launching the People's Panel on Child wellbeing.

Today a coalition of non-government and philanthropic organisations launched an innovative worldwide first for democracy to focus attention on reducing the number of children entering the child protection system.

'Everyday' South Australians will work with a small number of non-government organisations to develop an election policy on child wellbeing. The policy will be provided to all political parties in the lead up to the March 2017 election.

The process will involve 50 South Australians working closely with up to 15 non-government organisations (the People's Panel) to hear the issues, explore the problem in depth and develop a draft suite of policy initiatives in answer to the question: ***What needs to happen to increase the number of children living safely at home and avoid the need for them to be removed from their parents and family?***

All South Australians will then have the opportunity to have their say and will be asked for their feedback on the draft concepts before they are revised and finalised by the People's Panel.

The policy will be presented to all political parties in November 2017.

The process is completely nonpartisan with all political parties being asked to be involved and to receive the panel's work.

Organisations including the South Australian Council of Social Services, The Wyatt Trust, Uniting Communities, Community Centres SA and the Aboriginal Family Support Service have formed a partnership to spearhead this new initiative and are united in their concern about keeping children safe in their homes and communities.

In launching the People's Policy, CEO of the South Australian Council for Social Services Ross Womersley said, "This process represents a step change in our democracy. This process turns government on its head – and puts everyday South Australians in control."

"Election policies quite often represent what politicians think will be attractive to win a small number of voters in marginal seats – not always what is important to the long-term future of our State and or the needs of South Australians."

"Unlike normal election policy processes, this process will involve all South Australians with an interest and will be conducted in a transparent manner" he said.

Simon Schrapel AM, Chief Executive of Uniting Communities reflected on the issue stating "South Australia desperately needs to rethink how we work with families and the community to improve safety and wellbeing for our children. Our current approach remains too piecemeal and half-hearted resulting in an ever increasing number of children coming into contact with our Child protection authorities and ending up in care. It's simply not fair for children, for families and given the escalating costs of our crisis focussed responses, our economy. We need a different solution – urgently" he said.

“Ultimately, preventing the abuse of children, means addressing the causes behind the abuse, and hence requires a focus on domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse; and amongst other complex issues sometimes it’s just the result of poverty.” said Ross Womersley.

“Because its complex the problem of how we can ensure South Australia is the best state for all children and young people to grow up in isn’t commonly the focus of election policies. Addressing these problems takes time so the issue doesn’t lend itself to easy short term political wins and simple policies. We want to change that” he said.

Local company democracyCo will be running the process on behalf of the partners.

“We believe the South Australian public is more likely to trust policy solutions they have played a central role in developing. We believe that strong partnerships built between organisations and the community will also assist in engendering trust and confidence” said Co CEO of democracyCo Emma Lawson.

For more information please contact –

Ross Womersley, SACOSS - 0418 805 426

Simon Schrapel, Uniting Communities – 0411 643 132

Sharron Williams, Aboriginal Family Support Services – 8205 1500

Paul Madden, The Wyatt Trust – 0411 740 549

Gill McFadyen, Community Centres SA – 0422 165 490

Emma Lawson, democracyCo – 0421 098 355 or emma@democracyco.com.au