

Ms Megan Mitchell
National Children's Commissioner

29 May 2014

Dear Commissioner,

RE: Inquiry into how children and young people under 18 years can be better protected from intentional self-harm and suicidal behaviour.

The Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS) is the leading peak organisation for the community services sector in Western Australia, and represents its 300 members and the over 800 organisations involved in the provision of services to individuals, families and children in our community. WACOSS has strong relationships with the community services sector and represents the interests of the sector and the communities they serve. The Council therefore is in a unique position to comment on critical social issues that affect members of the Western Australian community, including the wellbeing of children and young people.

Accordingly, we welcome the inquiry you have initiated into how children and young people under 18 years can be better protected from intentional self-harm and suicidal behaviour. This is an issue to which our WA Commissioner for Children and Young People has also given some attention and is an issue of concern for a number of our member organisations who, I am sure, will be making a submission directly to you. My purpose in contacting you is to alert you to some work that WACOSS initiated earlier in the year which may feed into your deliberations. Dr Stuart Shanker was appointed by the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Michelle Scott, as her 2012 Thinker in Residence. The influence of Stuart's 2012 visit was certainly profound and continuing discussions across the community sector about the nexus between neuroscience and child development created ideal conditions for a developing interest and engagement in self-regulation. A number of community service organisations in the early childhood, disability, health and education service areas were interested in working with Stuart and his colleagues in a more in-depth fashion around self-regulation, applying it to the work of their services. WACOSS arranged for Dr Shanker and Mr Mike McKay who is the Director of the Canadian Self-Regulation Initiative to visit Perth during the first half of February, 2014.

While a range of the activities Dr Shanker and Mr McKay undertook while in Perth are relevant, one of particular note was a forum jointly sponsored by the Mental Health Commission and the Department for Education titled: *Self harm within a self-regulation framework for young children*. The public seminar followed on from a breakfast session on the same topic, which was also co-hosted by the same partners and the Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention, and had an invited audience. It was designed to feed into work the Education Department is currently undertaking around developing guidelines for schools on self-harm. The self-regulation framework provides an early intervention approach to some of the issues around children and young people who are self-harming and, as such, is important to refer to your Inquiry.



Western Australian
Council of Social Service Inc
ABN 32 201 266 289

City West Lotteries House
2 Delhi Street
West Perth
Western Australia 6005

Phone (08) 9420 7222
Fax (08) 9486 7966
Email info@wacoss.org.au
www.wacoss.org.au

some of the issues around children and young people who are self-harming and, as such, is important to refer to your Inquiry.

WACOSS is endeavouring to ensure that the momentum created during the February visit can be sustained through a range of different activities. One of these is a Practice Leaders Network, which comprises 12 dedicated practitioners from across the government, community and private sectors, which will drive some of this work. Another is maintaining a dedicated sub site on the WACOSS website where we are continuing to add new resources (such as videos from some of the presentations).

<http://www.wacoss.org.au/Shanker2014.aspx>

We are happy to provide any further information about this work which you would consider relevant.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Irina Cattalini', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Irina Cattalini
Chief Executive Officer