Good Beginnings Response:

National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention 2014

Good Beginnings Australia is a national charity that works to build better outcomes for children in vulnerable communities through early intervention and practical parenting programs.

Good Beginnings vision, ‘a good beginning for every child in Australia’, is driven by an acknowledgement of the critical importance of the early years in shaping children’s current and future wellbeing. Positive outcomes for children are best achieved when families (in their diverse forms) are supported and strengthened. Good Beginnings extends this position to all children, regardless of place of birth (country or suburb) or mode of arrival to Australia.

In the absence of a national outcomes framework for children and young people, Good Beginnings refers to the outcomes framework in The NEST Action Agenda¹ informed by children and other stakeholders and coordinated by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY). This framework promotes that all children should have the following five outcomes:

- Loved and Safe
- Participating
- Have material basics
- Learning
- Healthy

An evaluation of the impact of detention on children should be informed through consideration of these 5 outcomes. Good Beginnings is concerned that children living in detention are experiencing conditions that will have negative impacts on these outcomes.

All children need access to:

- Protection of their rights;
- Freedom to develop and explore their worlds; and
- Access to developing secure attachments and family relationships;

Good Beginnings shares the Human Rights Commission’s concerns relating to the ‘inappropriate accommodation’, ‘harsh physical environments’, ‘lack of access to education’ and ‘lack of suitable recreational opportunities for children in detention’².

Australia’s current policy relating to detaining children is inconsistent with Australia’s obligations under the Convention of the Rights of the Child³ which requires that detention be a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.

What does our experience tell us?

Drawing on experience of working in communities that are home to families with experience of seeking asylum in Australia Good Beginnings is aware of the significant trauma and ongoing impacts associated with this experience. Families face complex issues compounded by their experiences of both seeking asylum and fleeing their home country. Children often experience significant health and developmental risks factors that can present as learning or behavioural issues, which have the potential for lasting impacts on their ongoing health and development. This is also often coupled with interrupted attachment and parenting difficulties.

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What do children have to say?
In a recent consultation with children aged 0-12 across Australia attending Good Beginnings programs children told us the value and importance of having close and strong connections with their families. Some children expressed their sadness as a result of being separated by circumstance from their loved ones. In this consultation children also spoke about the importance of places of their own, and having access to resources that made them comfortable and happy. They shared information about the importance of simple things that helped them to feel comfortable and safe. Space, particularly space that they could express ownership over, was a key theme in the responses of children.

It is acknowledged that while these consultations were not targeted specifically at children in detention or with experience of seeking asylum, the consistency of the response by children who participated highlights the importance of space and resources, freedom of movement and access to loved ones that is an important component of childhood and is compromised when children are detained rather than housed.

Final remarks
Good Beginnings believe that all children should be afforded conditions in which they are best able to develop and thrive, today and into the future. It is for this reason that Good Beginnings does not support the detention or undue separation of children from their families while seeking asylum in Australia.

*Connect with Children: Consultation Report available at [www.tiny.cc/connectwithchildren](http://www.tiny.cc/connectwithchildren)*