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Media release

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Department of Social Services funding cut ignores the best interests of children.

The Department of Social Services has announced that it will discontinue \$280,000 in annual Commonwealth funding for a family program run by the Karralika Programs drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre.

Ben Ettinger, the Convenor of Australian Lawyers for Human Rights in the Australian Capital Territory, expressed dismay at the decision.

“Karralika Programs has been providing drug and alcohol rehabilitation services in the ACT and southern NSW region for 38 years,” said Mr Ettinger.

“This is an important program, offering treatment for the whole family and supporting young children to reside with their parents for up to 12 months. Children take part in an early childhood development program and families spend time together to strengthen their relationships. They are supported by a Social Worker and team of Family Case Workers and have access to counselling and other support services.”

Mr Ettinger said, “we are deeply concerned about the loss of this program. The Family Program is the only one of its kind in the ACT/southern NSW region. The impact of its cessation will be particularly acute for those children whose parents must undertake a court ordered rehabilitation program.”

“Discontinuing the Family Program will mean that parents who are in long term residential rehabilitation will no longer have a full and fair opportunity to demonstrate their parenting capacity.”

“Without the Family Program, foster care will be the only option for children whose parents require rehabilitation and for whom alternative care arrangements cannot be made. We are gravely concerned that this will mean more children in out of home simply because there is no other alternative.” said Mr Ettinger.

“This decision has real human rights implications. Australia has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 3 of which stipulates that *the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration*. The Australian government is obliged to refrain from actions that run contrary to the spirit of the Convention. In the circumstances, it cannot be in the best interests of children to be placed in out of home care merely because of a \$280,000 funding cut.

“There are no other alternatives in Canberra or the surrounding region that can give parents attending long term rehabilitation the opportunity to demonstrate their capacity to care,” Mr Ettinger said.

“We are urging Scott Morrison, the new Minister for Social Services, to reinstate funding for the Family Program.”

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