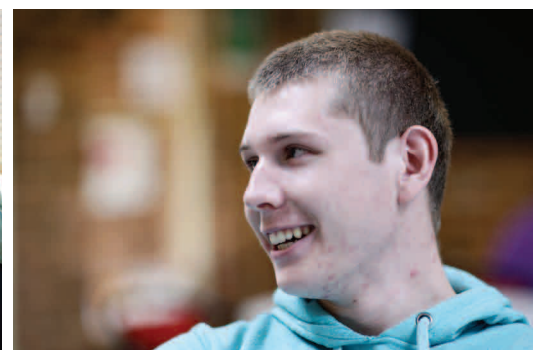


# UnitingCare Burnside

20 steps for safe children, strong families,  
inclusive communities in a just society

NSW State Election 2011



**This document has been produced by UnitingCare Burnside to inform and encourage advocacy in the lead up to the 2011 NSW State Election about issues affecting disadvantaged people in our community.**

**The 20 steps within this document, if implemented by a future NSW Government, would help ensure vulnerable children, young people and families receive the help they need, when they need it, for as long as they need it.**

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# Contents

About UnitingCare Burnside	2
A message from the Chief Executive Officer	3
UnitingCare Burnside's 20 steps for safe children, strong families, inclusive communities in a just society	4
Actions	
What you can do to support UnitingCare Burnside's 20 steps	6
Our election priority areas	
A child protection system that works for children	8
Increased access to early childhood education and care	9
Support for children with disabilities	10
Reform of the juvenile justice system in NSW	11
Further reading and information	12
About UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families	13

## About UnitingCare Burnside

UnitingCare Burnside began in 1911 when the first home was opened at North Parramatta for orphaned and abandoned children. Now in our centenary year, we are one of the largest providers of child and family services in New South Wales. In 2010 UnitingCare Burnside worked with 13,000 children, young people and family members.

Our services work directly with children and young people and with families in programs for early intervention and child wellbeing, child protection and out-of-home care. We work in disadvantaged communities across rural, regional and metropolitan NSW.

Our work is informed by research and evaluation and we actively advocate alongside the people who use our services with the aim of making positive social change and influencing public and social policy.

UnitingCare Burnside is a member of the UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families Service Group of UnitingCare NSW.ACT.

# A message from the Chief Executive Officer

Providing our most vulnerable children with a safe, nurturing environment, and the best possible start to life should be the highest priority of any government.

In the 2009/10 financial year, 17,400 vulnerable children and young people in NSW were unable to live with their families, and were in out-of-home care: an increase of 5.3% from 2008/09.<sup>1</sup> This is devastating, not only for the children involved but for their families, and comes with a huge social and financial cost for the community as a whole.

UnitingCare Burnside works with more than 13,000 children, young people and families every year, providing services across the continuum of care and protection. We work with families who are having difficult times and children and young people in need of care and support. Our focus is on the wellbeing of children because we know that children matter.



*20 steps for safe children, strong families, inclusive communities in a just society* outlines 20 important policy measures, across four key priority areas, which, if implemented by a future NSW Government, would help ensure that vulnerable children, young people and families receive the help they need, when they need it, for as long as they need it.

In our centenary year, I can reflect on the proud achievements of UnitingCare Burnside. For 100 years we have been a positive force caring for children in NSW and we believe that the NSW State Election in 2011 can and should make a positive difference for children too.

Underpinning our 20 steps is the belief that the service system to support children, young people and their families offers a continuum of care that allows people to access the right services at the right time. A continuum of care means timely interventions at the level of intensity and duration they are required. This should inform the design, planning and resource allocation decisions so all children get the best possible start in life. The continuum should range from universal services that are available to all families to secondary and tertiary services for families in need of more intensive support.

Across all our services and programs UnitingCare Burnside is committed to evidence-based practice. Our recommendations are based on listening to what children, young people and their families tell us about what needs to be different, our extensive experience of delivering services across NSW, our research and evaluation of program models and our social policy analysis and advocacy. Our recommendations provide the platform for a better, more comprehensive service system to support children, young people and their families. As members of our community we can all support these 20 steps to ensure a better outcome for vulnerable people.

I urge all parties and independent candidates in this election to commit to the 20 steps we propose and show that they really believe that children matter.

I am delighted to commend *20 steps for safe children, strong families, inclusive communities in a just society* to all candidates running at the 2011 NSW State Election, and look forward to these important steps being taken by the next Government of NSW.

We hope you will join us in making a difference for children in 2011.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Woodruff". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Jane Woodruff  
Chief Executive Officer, UnitingCare Burnside  
Director, UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families

# UnitingCare Burnside's 20 steps for safe children, strong families, inclusive communities in a just society

- 1. Retain Keep Them Safe** as the basis for the child wellbeing and child protection system in NSW.
- 2. Transfer all out-of-home care services and placements to the non-government sector**, as recommended by the Wood Special Commission of Inquiry and supported by the Coalition for Children in Care, including:
  - the development of a transition plan for this process to commence within six months of the new government taking office; and
  - the establishment of fair and reasonable contracting based on the full costs of delivering accredited, quality care for all children in out-of-home care with all services transferred to the non-government sector by 2014.
- 3. Continue the investment in the Brighter Futures program** as a successful evidence-based model for secondary intervention to support families where children may be at risk of entry into the child protection system and **ensure that this program is fully delivered by the non-government sector within two years.**
- 4. Expand Family Referral Services** to be available in all regions across NSW, with provision for family referrals to take place by telephone or face-to-face where necessary. This program should be rolled out in all regions within two years.
- 5. Increase the availability of Family Group Conferencing** to all families where children are at imminent risk of being removed to help ensure all options for children's care and support are examined. This program should be expanded across NSW over two years.
- 6. Expand secondary intervention services** including NEWPIN (New Parent Infant Network) to help families address child safety and wellbeing concerns and prevent children from entering the out-of-home care system. New services should be established within 12 months.
- 7. Meet the NSW commitments under National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children**, including implementation of the requirement for aftercare plans for all young people leaving care (National Out of Home Care Standards) to commence immediately.
- 8. Increase the number of children participating in early childhood education in NSW** (from 81% to at least 95%) to meet the Council of Australian Government's goals of universal access for all four-year-olds in the year prior to starting school within two years.
- 9. Provide free early childhood education and care for children from disadvantaged and low income families** in the two years prior to starting school to maximise the benefits of early childhood education for vulnerable children within two years.

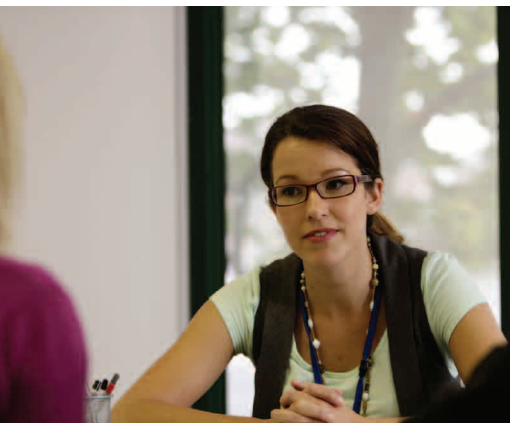
- 10. Establish integrated, co-located child and family centres** (which include early childhood education and care services, family support and maternal and child health services) in areas of identified disadvantage including communities with high numbers of Aboriginal children within two years.
- 11. Transfer the responsibilities for funding and regulation of all current early childhood education and care services to the NSW Department of Education**, with increased support and funding to meet the requirements of the National Quality Framework in the Government's first term of office.
- 12. Fund \$21.1 million over five years to implement 1,000 flexible funding packages to assist children with autism** as detailed in Stronger Together 2.
- 13. Fund \$77.6 million over five years to implement 3,700 early intervention packages for children and young people** as detailed in Stronger Together 2.
- 14. Fund \$53 million over five years to implement 380 new intensive family support packages**, with 180 packages specifically targeted for Aboriginal families as detailed in Stronger Together 2.
- 15. Develop and implement suitable mediation processes, such as Family Group Conferencing**, where a child or young person with a disability is not able to live with their family due to concerns for their safety and wellbeing, to help create sustainable arrangements for children within 12 months.
- 16. Undertake major reform of the juvenile justice system** using Justice Reinvestment as the underpinning framework with planning and implementation to commence immediately.
- 17. Conduct a comprehensive review of the Bail Act 1978** in consultation with the non-government sector and exempt young people from Section 22A of the Act within six months.
- 18. Resource and support Aboriginal communities to develop and implement strategies to reduce the numbers of Aboriginal children and young people in contact with the juvenile justice system** to commence within 12 months.
- 19. Increase community support for people in pre-court and during court processes** in addition to access to a solicitor for young people and children charged with a criminal offence to commence within 12 months.
- 20. Set new operational targets for the NSW Police Force to increase the use of diversionary options under the Young Offenders Act 1997** including warnings, cautions and juvenile justice conferencing to commence within 12 months.

# Actions

## What you can do to support UnitingCare Burnside's 20 steps

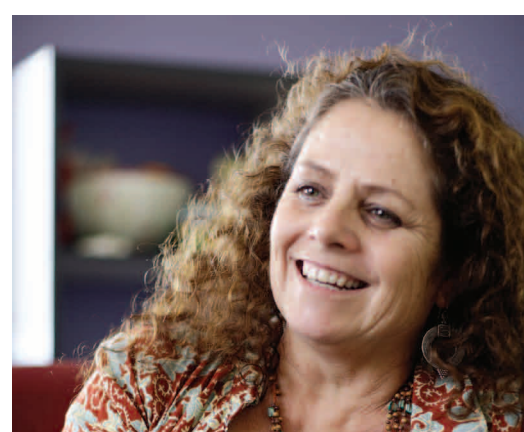
### What you can do as an individual:

- Take this paper to your local candidates and ask them what they are going to do to implement our *20 steps to create safe children, strong families, inclusive communities in a just society*.
- Raise the issues in this paper at local meetings and election events, via Twitter and Facebook – make sure local candidates know that these issues should be included in their election commitments.
- Write an email to party leaders and ask them to support UnitingCare Burnside's 20 steps.
- Log on to UnitingCare's election website [www.withoutfearorfavour.org.au](http://www.withoutfearorfavour.org.au) and connect with others who care about these issues.
- Check the website [www.withoutfearorfavour.org.au](http://www.withoutfearorfavour.org.au) regularly to keep up to date with our election advocacy, and take part in online surveys.



## What you can do as a political candidate or party:

- Tell your constituents and supporters about the steps you plan to take to make a positive difference for children via your website, Twitter and Facebook.
- Talk about these issues in your election campaign – make sure children aren't in the 'too hard basket'.
- Log on to UnitingCare's website [www.withoutfearorfavour.org.au](http://www.withoutfearorfavour.org.au) and keep up to date with our election advocacy.
- Review your party policies – can you and your party take the 20 steps?



# Our election priority areas

## A child protection system that works for children

All children and young people deserve the best possible start in life. The priority of the NSW Government must be the wellbeing of all children and ensuring vulnerable children have a safe and secure environment.

Young people growing up in out-of-home care are over represented in the NSW statistics on early school leaving, poor physical and mental health, homelessness and juvenile justice. This has to change. In 2008 the *Wood Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW* found that children and young people receive a higher level of care and support when placed with accredited non-government providers compared with those placed within the NSW Government's out-of-home care services.

The recommendations of the Wood Report set up a framework for the statutory child protection system in NSW that can deliver better outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people.

Very limited progress has been made on a key recommendation of the Wood Commission, transferring services for children and young people in out-of-home care to non-government agencies. The Coalition for Children in Care, a coalition of 27 non-government out-of-home care providers (including Burnside) has set out the policy commitments that need to be funded and implemented by the next NSW Government. These commitments will lead to better outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people and can be viewed at [www.timetocare.org.au](http://www.timetocare.org.au).

### UnitingCare Burnside calls on all parties to commit to:

- 1. Retain Keep Them Safe** as the basis for the child wellbeing and child protection system in NSW.
- 2. Transfer all out-of-home care services and placements to the non-government sector**, as recommended by the Wood Special Commission of Inquiry and supported by the Coalition for Children in Care, including:
  - the development of a transition plan for this process to commence within six months of the new Government taking office; and
  - the establishment of fair and reasonable contracting based on the full costs of delivering accredited, quality care for all children in out-of-home care with all services transferred to the non-government sector by 2014.
- 3. Continue the investment in the Brighter Futures program** as a successful evidence-based model for secondary intervention to support families where children may be at risk of entry into the child protection system and **ensure that this program is fully delivered by the non-government sector within two years.**
- 4. Expand Family Referral Services** to be available in all regions across NSW, with provision for family referrals to take place by telephone or face-to-face where necessary. This program should be rolled out in all regions within two years.
- 5. Increase the availability of Family Group Conferencing** to all families where children are at imminent risk of being removed to help ensure all options for children's care and support are examined. This program should be expanded across NSW over two years.
- 6. Expand secondary intervention services** including NEWPIN (New Parent Infant Network) to help families address child safety and wellbeing concerns and prevent children from entering the out-of-home care system. New services should be established within 12 months.
- 7. Meet the NSW commitments under National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children**, including implementation of the requirement for aftercare plans for all young people leaving care (National Out of Home Care Standards) to commence immediately.

## Increased access to early childhood education and care

There is a growing body of international evidence that children's participation in early childhood education significantly improves their experiences and achievements in primary and high school and, indeed, in adult life.

High-quality early childhood education increases children's wellbeing by learning through play. It builds the foundations for children's literacy and numeracy, improves social skills and enables early intervention for children with developmental delays that may impact on future life chances.

Research tells us that children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit most from early childhood education. However, these children are most likely to miss out on access to early childhood education due to the high cost of Preschool and Long Day Care services in NSW.

Recently released figures on access to early childhood education show that as many as one in five children are not attending an early childhood service in the year prior to starting school.<sup>11</sup>

UnitingCare Burnside together with UnitingCare Children's Services strongly supports the initiatives under way through the Council of Australian Governments' National Early Childhood Development Strategy, including the commitment to enable children to receive early childhood education for 15 hours a week for 40 weeks per year in the year prior to starting school.

### UnitingCare Burnside calls on all parties to commit to:

- 8. Increase the number of children participating in early childhood education in NSW** (from 81% to at least 95%) to meet the Council of Australian Government's goals of universal access for all four year olds in the year prior to starting school within two years.
- 9. Provide free early childhood education and care for children from disadvantaged and low income families** in the two years prior to starting school to maximise the benefits of early childhood education for vulnerable children within two years.
- 10. Establish integrated, co-located child and family centres** (which include early childhood education and care services, family support and maternal and child health services) in areas of identified disadvantage including communities with high numbers of Aboriginal children within two years.
- 11. Transfer the responsibilities for funding and regulation of all current early childhood education and care services to the NSW Department of Education**, with increased support and funding to meet the requirements of the National Quality Framework in the Government's first term of office.

## Support for children with disabilities

Many parents of children with disabilities struggle to access the sustained support and services that will help their child reach their full potential. The system of disability support services in NSW must be improved to ensure that children with disabilities and their families have universal access to the planning and supports they need when they need them.

Some of the most difficult challenges faced by families are in accessing the services and supports they need at a time when assistance can be most effective. UnitingCare Burnside has experience in providing intensive in-home support to families, so we know what works. By strengthening families, they have the best opportunity to stay together and over time is the most cost effective way to support children with disabilities.

UnitingCare Burnside supports the second phase of Stronger Together and we strongly encourage all parties to implement the plan as a way to support families where a child has a disability.<sup>iii</sup>

We know that usually the best option for children and young people with disabilities is to be with their families, but sometimes this is not possible. When this happens, the system must respond first to children and engage with families. The Wood Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services recommended that mediation processes could help these children and families find the right solution. Working with families is critical to ensuring the wellbeing of children and young people with a disability.

### UnitingCare Burnside calls on all parties to commit to:

- 12.** Fund \$21.1 million over five years to **implement 1,000 flexible funding packages to assist children with autism** as detailed in Stronger Together 2.
- 13.** Fund \$77.6 million over five years to **implement 3,700 early intervention packages for children and young people** as detailed in Stronger Together 2.
- 14.** Fund \$53 million over five years to **implement 380 new intensive family support packages**, with 180 packages specifically targeted for Aboriginal families as detailed in Stronger Together 2.
- 15.** **Develop and implement suitable mediation processes, such as Family Group Conferencing**, where a child or young person with a disability is not able to live with their family due to concerns for their safety and wellbeing, to help create sustainable arrangements for children within 12 months.

## Reform of the juvenile justice system in NSW

Children and young people in NSW are placed in juvenile detention at four times the rate of Victoria. Fifty per cent of young people placed in detention are 'on remand' waiting for their hearing but after being held in detention, 80% of these young people will not get a custodial sentence. This means that over 3,000 young people are being needlessly exposed to juvenile detention every year. Indigenous young people represent almost 40% of the juvenile remand population.

NSW needs to dramatically reduce the number of young people held on remand and put in place policies and programs to prevent young people coming into contact with the juvenile justice system. Reducing the number of people on remand alone would mean better outcomes for young people, but also release the pressure on juvenile justice centres, saving approximately \$500 every day for every young person on remand.

The Noetic Review of the Juvenile Justice system in 2010 recommended major reforms of the system through using a Justice Reinvestment approach. Justice Reinvestment involves redirecting funding away from detention (including remand) to early intervention and prevention programs and services to reduce the number of young people who offend and come into contact with the juvenile justice system.

### UnitingCare Burnside calls on all parties to commit to:

- 16. Undertake major reform of the juvenile justice system<sup>iv</sup>** using Justice Reinvestment as the underpinning framework with planning and implementation to commence immediately.
- 17. Conduct a comprehensive review of the Bail Act 1978** in consultation with the non-government sector and exempt young people from Section 22A of the Act within six months.
- 18. Resource and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to develop and implement strategies to reduce the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in contact with the juvenile justice system** to commence within 12 months.
- 19. Increase community support for people in pre-court and during court processes** in addition to access to a solicitor for young people and children charged with a criminal offence to commence within 12 months.
- 20. Set new operational targets for the NSW Police Force to increase the use of diversionary options under the Young Offenders Act 1997** including warnings, cautions and juvenile justice conferencing to commence within 12 months.

## Further reading and information

UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families, *Submission on Family Violence: Improving Legal Frameworks*, Australian Law Reform Commission and NSW Law Reform Commission, June 2010

UnitingCare Burnside, *Grandparent kinship care in NSW: UnitingCare Burnside supporting grandparent kinship carers*, May 2010

UnitingCare Burnside and UnitingCare Australia, *Submission on the Development of National Standards for Out of Home Care*, Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, March 2010

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UnitingCare Children Young People and Families, *Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into the Contribution of the Not-for-Profit-Sector*, June 2009

UnitingCare Burnside, *Locked into remand: Children and young people on remand in NSW*, February 2009

UnitingCare Burnside, *Submission to the Early Child Education and Care Quality Reform Agenda*, Council of Australian Governments, September 2008

UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families, *Social Inclusion: Making a difference for children at risk of lifetime disadvantage*, June 2008

UnitingCare Burnside, *Celebrating 15 years of social justice advocacy*, May 2008

UnitingCare Burnside, *Submission to the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW*, February 2008

UnitingCare Burnside, *Integrated child and family services: An innovative approach to early intervention*, August 2007

UnitingCare Burnside, *Family group conferencing and child protection legislation in NSW*, March 2007

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### References

<sup>i</sup>2009/10 Department of Human Services – Community Services Annual Report.

<sup>ii</sup>NSW Department of Human Services Community Services, NSW Department of Education and Training, 2010, Annual Report 2009 Universal Access to Early Childhood Education (UAECE) New South Wales, submitted to Council of Australian Government's National Early Childhood Development Agenda.

<sup>iii</sup>NSW Government, Stronger Together: the second phase 2011-2016, December 2010.

<sup>iv</sup>Noetic Solutions 2010, A Strategic Review of the New South Wales Juvenile Justice System: Report for the Minister for Juvenile Justice, Noetic Solutions.

# About UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families

UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families is a Service Group of UnitingCare NSW.ACT and part of the Uniting Church in Australia. We stand in the Uniting Church tradition of compassion and concern for justice.

Our concerns for social justice and the needs of children, young people and families who are disadvantaged inform the way we serve and represent people and communities.

UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families brings together UnitingCare Burnside, UnitingCare Unifam, UnitingCare Children's Services, UnitingCare Disability and the Institute of Family Practice. Together these organisations form one of the largest providers of services to support children and families in NSW.

- **UnitingCare Burnside**

The aim of UnitingCare Burnside is to protect children from abuse and neglect by breaking cycles of disadvantage and building on strengths. This is achieved by providing services across a continuum of care that supports healthy family relationships, encourages positive change through education and learning, and builds strong connected communities. The out-of-home care services provide children and young people who cannot live with their families, with safe and stable environments.

- **UnitingCare Unifam**

UnitingCare Unifam is funded by the Federal Attorney-General's Department and FaHCSIA to provide family counselling and Family Dispute Resolution under the Family Law Act including three Family Relationship Centres in NSW.

- **UnitingCare Children's Services**

UnitingCare Children's Services provides accessible children's services, such as Preschool and Long Day Care services, within a not-for-profit community service environment. It licenses, resources and oversees services operated by Management Committees of local Uniting Church congregations as well as providing support, guidance and direction to its own Directly-Provided Services.

- **UnitingCare Disability**

UnitingCare Disability provides services and support for people with disabilities, their families and carers, as they build and pursue their goals and dreams, and with local communities to strengthen their capacity to fully include people with disabilities.

- **Institute of Family Practice**

UnitingCare Institute of Family Practice is a Registered Training Organisation with the NSW Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board in the Vocational Education Training sector. The Institute of Family Practice provides leading edge training that is both evidence and practice based. The Institute is a key provider of training and development for people working in the child, family and relationship sector and a major contributor to the development of a robust and highly skilled workforce within the UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families Service Group and across the non-government sector.

## **For more information, please contact:**

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