Freedom from violence – the child rights issue of our time

Commissioner Megan Mitchell
National Children’s Commissioner
Australian Human Rights Commission

Megan Mitchell began her five-year term as Australia’s first National Children’s Commissioner in March 2013. In her first year, Commissioner Mitchell completed a national listening tour with children, young people and their advocates to identify the priority child rights issues for her role.

The right to freedom from violence, abuse and neglect was consistently raised as one of the most important issues for children and young people in consultations throughout Australia.

Commissioner Mitchell identified the relationship between intentional self-harm in children and family and domestic violence as a research priority in her Children’s Rights Report 2014.

In 2015 the National Children’s Commissioner conducted a national investigation into the impact of family and domestic violence on children.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child requires Australia to use a child rights-based approach to address family and domestic violence so that:

• vulnerable and marginalised groups of children are protected
• the best interests of children are prioritised
• the views of children are respected
• prevention measures consider the impact of family and domestic violence on children’s development.

The National Children’s Commissioner’s investigation involved a series of expert roundtables, individual consultations, a submissions process and sourcing custom data about children’s experiences of family and domestic violence.

Data based on the ABS 2012 Personal Safety Survey estimates the number of adult men and women whose first incident of physical or sexual abuse as a child before the age of 15 years was perpetrated by a family members.

It is estimated that 1 in every 12 people first experienced physical abuse and 1 in every 28 people first experienced sexual abuse as a child before the age of 15 years perpetrated by a family member.

Commissioner Mitchell’s presentation will provide a summary of the key findings, recommendations, and policy and research implications from the national investigation.