

# Kids' best interests overshadowed

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## FULL TEXT

THE child protection system is not trauma informed or culturally safe, experts say, and is in desperate need of better regulation, ongoing training, support and supervision of staff, as well as better planning.

It is not the system we need, says Dr Tamara Blakemore, social work lecturer at the University of Newcastle.

Organisational factors are "consistently and seemingly without shame" overshadowing the best interests of the children they serve, she says.

Dr Blakemore, a member of the Families and Children Expert Panel and Industry provider list for the federal Department of Social Services, said investment in the ongoing training, support and supervision of staff who oversaw the lives of children in need was sorely needed.

"This means there also needs to be a corresponding shift in the accessibility, affordability and appropriateness of available training offers," Dr Blakemore said.

Her comments followed the release of the Hughes review, which the NSW Department of Communities and Families commissioned after Children's Court magistrate Tracy Sheedy put on the public record the "unconscionable" treatment and "appalling neglect" of two boys in a judgement in October last year.

The Hughes brothers, in Year 6 and 7 when they were removed from their mother in 2020, went on to experience abuse, neglect and serious psychological harm at the hands of strangers. Former National Children's Commissioner for the Australian Human Rights Commission Megan Mitchell's review cites systemic failures involving every one of the service providers paid to care for the children.

"The Hughes review makes timely commentary on the realities of practitioners who work with and across the social and human service sector, the worries, concerns, pressures, and overwhelming sense that the system we have, is not the system we need," Dr Blakemore said.

"It is a system that prioritises a business, or actuarial model of practice, with inputs in and outcomes out".

Family support and foster care charity Barnardos chief executive Deirdre Cheers said an ongoing lack of focus on comprehensive and well-assessed planning for kids in crisis removed from their families was leading to disaster.

CREDIT: Gabriel Fowler

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