

Hunter ACS

1984 – c. 2013

Other Names: • Hunter Aboriginal Children's Service

HACS

Details

Hunter ACS was a New South Wales Aboriginal Children's Services organisation that began in Newcastle in 1984 following a need, identified by the Aboriginal Legal Service, for an Aboriginal service to take responsibility for fostering Aboriginal children of the Hunter with Aboriginal families. By August 2013 it had closed.

Hunter Aboriginal Children's Services was a community-based non-government agency. It favoured foster care over residential care and supported Aboriginal families with a Family Support Program. It received funding from the New South Wales Government.

In 2012 the former CEO of Hunter ACS, Steven Larkins, was jailed for possessing child pornography, child sexual assault, fraud and falsifying his employment record.

In August 2013 the case was considered by the Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse (Case Study 1). The Royal Commission heard that Larkins was granted parental responsibility for 6 children in the care of Hunter ACS. The NSW Department of Community Services properly found Larkins to be a risk to children on the basis of the information it had on 11 November 2003. Larkins provided a false statutory declaration and concealed his Working with Children Check assessment from the Management Committee and continued to work for Hunter ACS. Criminal investigations into Larkins did not commence until 2011. At the time he was sentenced, Larkins had parental responsibility for 19 Aboriginal children in the Hunter region (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 2013)

One of the findings of the Royal Commission Case Study No 1 was that "Hunter Aboriginal Children's Service Management Committee members who gave evidence to the Royal Commission were inexperienced in organisational management and lacked knowledge of governance and legislative and regulatory frameworks relevant to Hunter Aboriginal Children's Service". It also found that Larkins "wielded influence" over the management committee and "restricted open communication" between the committee and Hunter ACS staff.

Hunter ACS had closed by August 2013. A newspaper article from that month described it as "now defunct". In October 2013 in the NSW Legislative Assembly, it was stated that the Department of Community Services has suspended referrals to Hunter ACS and that the Service "took the decision to cease operation".

National Redress Scheme for people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse

The New South Wales government has agreed to be a funder of last resort for this institution. This means that although the institution is now defunct, it is participating in the National Redress Scheme, and the government has agreed to pay the institution's share of costs of providing redress to a person (as long as the government is found to be equally responsible for the abuse a person experienced).

More info

Related Entries

Related Glossary Terms

• Aboriginal Child Placement Principle (1983 - current)

Related Organisations

- Department of Community Services, State Government of New South Wales (1992 2009)
- New South Wales Aboriginal Children's Services (1975 current)

Resources

• Overington, Caroline, Disservice to children, The Australian, 18 December 2008

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