

Embargoed until 10am, 10 December 2009

NSW Ombudsman

Report into the death of Dean Shillingsworth

On 17 October 2007, the body of a young boy was found in a public reserve in Sydney. He was later identified as Dean Shillingsworth, aged two years and seven months. Dean's mother was charged with his murder, and on 18 August 2009 she pleaded guilty to the charge.

Today NSW Ombudsman, Bruce Barbour, released a report outlining his findings following an investigation into Dean's death.

The report relates to the actions of the Department of Community Services, and a non-government family support service.

'My investigation found that the actions taken by both agencies did not effectively protect Dean. DoCS received numerous risk of harm reports about Dean and his siblings in the year before he died, none of which received comprehensive assessment. The non-government family support service worked with Dean and his mother at a critical time. However, the service failed to effectively identify the risks to Dean and to convey accurate information about the family's situation.'

The report details these issues, and also outlines improvements the involved agencies have made following Dean's death.

'It is important to remember that following Dean's death, the NSW government established a special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW' Mr Barbour said. **'The government's *Keep them Safe* action plan, drawing on the commission's recommendations, is an attempt to reform the system and address the types of problems identified in this report.'**

'However, as I have said previously, the current reforms carry with them risks and challenges' said the Ombudsman. **'I support the expansion of the role of non-government agencies in child protection. However, it is essential that we strengthen this sector's capacity to correctly identify and respond to the many more serious child protection cases they will now be required to deal with.'**