

Activist plans action over children abused in system

A WELL-KNOWN indigenous activist says he will serve the Department of Children and Families with a cease and desist notice saying the Government is failing in its duty of care towards abused and neglected children in the system.

His comments follow an NT News article yesterday about upcoming coronial inquests into the deaths of two children in the care of the Department of Children and Families.

The date of another inquest into the death of a six-month-old baby in Alice Springs last year under the care of the Department is yet to be listed.

David Cole is the founding director of the Balanu Foundation, which provides advocacy and support to at-risk youths in the Territory.

He said the ability of the Department to properly care for children is worse than it was in 2007 – when the Howard Federal government was prompted to stage an Intervention in the Northern Territory.

He said too many children were being neglected and abused within the care system because carers were not being thoroughly assessed by Government-funded agencies, adding that he'd be surprised if even 20 per cent were being effectively screened.

He cited one example of a young woman who told him she started drinking and smoking at the age of 10 because of the abuse her carer subjected her to.

The Department did not respond to questions about the screening of carers before deadline.

"My experience in dealing with and talking to people within that very Department is that carers are not being properly assessed," Mr Cole said.

"A great deal have not been through the full assessment process, with around 20 per cent fully screened.

"It's abuse on top of abuse ... it's double trauma for these children and that's why many are at risk of suicide and it's why they all turn to substance abuse." The "cease and desist" notice would allege the Department was acting in a "fraudulent" manner as it did not have jurisdiction to remove "sovereign tribal people" from their families. "Culturally appropriate care services should be delivered by **Aboriginal** people, run by **Aboriginal** people to deliver best care service necessary for **Aboriginal** children," Mr Cole said. "The Department – as a corporation – does not have jurisdiction of sovereign tribal people. Through this argument sovereign people of this continent

are basically being forced under a system that has no jurisdiction or authority over them.”

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MARIA BILLIAS, 'Cease and desist threat', *Northern Territory News* (online), 14 Mar 2016 7 <<https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.lib.uts.edu.au/apps/news/document-view?p=AUNB&docref=news/15B9BDD6E85D38B0>>

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