

AWCH 2005
“Healthy Solutions for Children: Making the Right Choice” Conference
Parramatta Carlton Hotel 28-29 April 2005

Abstract for keynote presentation by Dr Sev Ozdowski entitled
Convention on the Rights of the Child and Child Mental Health
Thursday 28 April Opening Plenary

Young People in Australia put at risk due to **lack of early intervention with**
regard to mental health services

Human Rights Commissioner Dr Sev Ozdowski says that in the wake of the landmark 2004 report on Children in Immigration Detention, other information has emerged which has a disturbing impact for every state in Australia.

The Report found that many children in detention suffered severe mental health problems – problems which need not have arisen at all. “We locked them up, we traumatised them, and now we are going to have to pay the price in mental health services”, Dr Ozdowski said.

In tracking down the services which were currently available, the Human Rights Commission heard a tale of misallocation of commonwealth funds, earmarked for mental health, and mental support services in crisis. Especially disturbing has been the failure of **early intervention strategies** with regard to young people with mental health issues. In some cases this has tragically led to suicide; in other cases the development of severe mental health problems, which might have been avoided or substantially alleviated.

“This is now not just about refugees, it is about all Australians. And the neglect occurs in every state in this country.”

Dr Ozdowski held a series of Australia-wide community consultations along with the Mental Health Council of Australia in the latter half of 2004. He first revealed some of these disturbing scenarios at an address at the National Press Club on August 25th, 2004.

It is a story that has been hidden. It is a story that needs to be told. And it is sad that it has taken traumatised refugee children to uncover the full extent of the problem.