

Statement

ParentsNext out of step with mothers and labour market

27 February 2019

Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand supports the objectives of ParentsNext as a pre-employment program to help parents identify their education and employment goals and participate in activities that enhance their job readiness. However, we are concerned about several aspects of the design and implementation of the program.

“Our objections include the misplaced focus on parents of infants and very young children,” said Stella Avramopoulos, CEO Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand. “Australian mothers carry a heavy load of non-market caring work which limits their capacity to engage in the labour market. Infants in particular need intensive around-the-clock care.”

Ms Avramopoulos added that Good Shepherd “does not support the linking of participation in ParentsNext with income support payments”, including the authority of private contractors to suspend payments under the Targeted Compliance Framework.

“Inflexibility in program delivery is resulting in a poor service experience for clients, who may be experiencing complex forms of disadvantage. The low level of income support and issues such as insecure housing, intimate partner violence and lack of child care can also be barriers to participation.”

ParentsNext’s focus on improving parenting skills bears no relation to labour market outcomes. “A better approach to supporting parenting is to fund voluntary, community-based programs such as Good Shepherd’s Sydney Young Parents Program which provides individual support, role modelling and reinforcement of positive parenting practices, and social connection through a supported playgroup.”

Ms Avramopoulos concludes, “There is potential for ParentsNext to be redesigned to provide genuine assistance to mothers with young children to increase their

employability if it's structured in a way that enables rather than punishes them. A voluntary program that incorporates tailored, holistic support—coupled with an increase in the level of income and other supports—would achieve better outcomes for single mothers and their children.”

ENDS.

