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MEDIA RELEASE

The Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) has released its 2018-19 Annual Report. The report has been tabled in the Northern Territory Parliament by Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Hon Natasha Fyles MLA.

2018-19 represented another significant year for the OCC, with the commencement of formal monitoring of places where vulnerable children are detained or reside; a recommendation of the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory.

Both the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre and the Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre were inspected using a framework modelled closely on the approach set out in the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment (OPCAT). Two reports were tabled by the Minister and all recommendations were accepted.

The Commissioner also conducted two own initiative investigations, one into the circumstances surrounding the alleged sexual assault of a child who had recently been in care. The second investigation examined separation procedures, collaboration between Territory Families and Department of Health staff and therapeutic and care planning provided to a young person in a youth detention centre.

The Commissioner was able to report some positive trends with regard to child protection, with a reductions in child abuse notifications and the number of children in care.

For the first time the Commissioner monitored the use of separation in youth detention centres. It was not possible to draw conclusions on trends based on the first 12 months of data however the OCC will continue to monitor to ensure separation is used as a last resort.

On the report's release, Northern Territory Children's Commissioner, Colleen Gwynne, said:

"The breadth of reform needed to truly and permanently shift the landscape in terms of outcomes for the Territory's children and young people demands an enduring commitment from everyone. This is primarily a whole of community issue.

"The greatest impact that can be had on changing the lives of vulnerable children is the realisation that we all need to place the best interests and needs of children at the centre of decision making."

The report can be found at <https://occ.nt.gov.au/publications>

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