



**17 December 2007**

## **Media release: New Children's Advocates for Otago**

"The appointment of Child Advocates in Dunedin and Queenstown will make sure that the needs of children and young people affected by domestic violence are better met," says Frederica Shannon, Team Leader of Barnardos New Zealand's Child and Family services in Otago.

Tina Mongston is the Advocate for children and young people in Queenstown, while Sue Bain is her equivalent in Dunedin. Both have extensive hands-on experience working with families and/or children and young people affected by domestic violence. They have been appointed by Barnardos New Zealand as part of a Ministry of Social Development initiative.

"Our Child Advocates are working within the community, alongside government, non government agencies, schools and families in cases of domestic violence that involve children and young people, to make sure that the children's voices are heard and their needs addressed appropriately in the short and long term," says Frederica.

"This role involves some direct case work, but the majority of the work is focused on raising the community's awareness of the impact of domestic violence on children and providing training, advice and support to those agencies and individuals working directly with the children."

"Child abuse is of great concern in this country. Children and young people who witness or experience violence in their home, live in difficult and potentially dangerous situations. They sense the tension that builds up prior to outbursts, hear the screaming, threats, yelling, and are quite often placed in the middle of adult arguments, manipulated to take sides and frequently become a target of the violence. "

"It can be very traumatic, particularly if the violence has been ongoing," says Frederica. "Children and young people often need a lot of support to help them deal with their experience and help them to recover a sense of safety and security so they are free to use their energies to grow rather than just survive and cope with the adult issues that they are forced to bear."

"Barnardos is very pleased to be involved in this initiative, which shows a commitment on the part of the Government to take action and provide a voice for children and young people and their right to live free from violence."

Barnardos has appointed five advocates so far in Invercargill, Dunedin, Queenstown, Gisborne and Waitakere City. The Ministry of Social Development initiative will see 45 Advocates appointed throughout the country over the next four years.

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### **For more information please contact:**

Frederica Shannon, Team Leader, Child and Family Services (Otago), Barnardos New Zealand  
Phone: (03) 4714337  
Email: frederica.shannon@barnardos.org.nz

Tina Mongston, Child Advocate, Queenstown  
Phone: (027) 632 0964  
Email: tina@abuseprevention.co.nz

Sue Bain, Child Advocate, Dunedin  
Phone: (03) 471 4333  
Email: sue.bain@barnardos.org.nz

### **Background notes:**

For more on the Child Advocates initiative visit [www.familyservices.govt.nz](http://www.familyservices.govt.nz)

Barnardos New Zealand offers a range of child and family services and early childhood education and care in Otago. Included is the 'Footsteps to Feeling Safe' information programme (accredited by the Ministry of Justice), which uses a mixture of play, creative activities and discussion to help children affected by domestic violence deal with issues such as: the secrecy surrounding domestic violence; the loss of a parent/caregiver; managing anger; expressing feelings appropriately; and developing safety plans.