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NSW Ombudsman **Annual report 2012-2013**

The NSW Ombudsman tabled his annual report this morning for 2012-2013.

The year at a glance

While statistics do not provide a full picture of the Ombudsman's work, they do show that the office continues to deal with a large number of matters. This year, the Ombudsman received 36,765 complaints and notifications. This includes 8,724 formal matters and 28,041 informal matters.

Fixing everyday, important problems

The Ombudsman helps to fix problems that can have a very real impact on people. **'When we get involved we can help to improve systems, overcome misunderstanding and establish effective communication between an agency and those receiving a service.'** the Ombudsman, Bruce Barbour, said. **'Our work can also result in changes that benefit a much larger part of the community'** Mr Barbour said. **'The constant factor in everything we do is that we are independent and impartial, and we are always working in the public interest.'** The diversity of the problems we can help to solve is shown in these examples from the report:

- Helping the mother of a man with intellectual and psychiatric disabilities to demonstrate her son was eligible for certain services. **'When we get involved we can help to resolve misunderstandings and achieve positive results.'** (case study 64, page 99).
- Reinforcing with a police command the importance of following requirements for strip searches (case study 1, page 45).
- Asking questions about delays in completing important work on a Housing NSW property. **'After our inquiries, it took just two days for the necessary maintenance work to get done'** the Ombudsman said (case study 37, page 70).
- Identifying potential risks in an out of home care placement, which led to Community Services arranging an alternative care arrangement (case study 57, page 90).
- Making sure inmates at a correctional centre have winter coats (case study 16, page 61).

Investigating and reporting on systemic issues

Each year, the Ombudsman conducts a range of investigations into areas of public importance. This year, we:

- Closely monitored the critical incident investigation of an incident in Kings Cross (case study 2, page 46).
- Investigated how effectively the NSW Office of Water is performing a range of important statutory functions (see page 73).

- Reviewed the support and assistance provided to young people leaving care. **‘These are young people moving into what can be a very challenging time in their lives. It is important they receive the assistance and support they need and deserve’** (see page 85).
- Commenced a major investigation into allegations regarding the conduct of officers of the NSW Police Force, Police Integrity Commission and NSW Crime Commission (see page 53).

The Ombudsman has reported the findings of a number of investigations directly to Parliament since his last annual report. These reports have dealt with:

- The use of Tasers by the NSW Police Force (see page 52).
- The administration of provisions to provide assistance to students with disabilities sitting their Higher School Certificate (see page 75).
- The access people in mental health facilities have to disability services and support (see page 100).
- The critical incident investigation into the death of Roberto Laudisio-Curti (see page 48).

We also issued the final report following our three-year audit of the *NSW Interagency Plan to Tackle Child Sexual Assault in Aboriginal Communities* (see page 105).

These reports are mentioned briefly in the annual report, and can be accessed at the Ombudsman’s website (www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/news-and-publications/publications/reports).

A continuing focus on important systems

The Ombudsman works to ensure the community receives the best possible services from both government and non-government providers.

‘We now have access to a wide range of information, often directly from agency databases. This allows us to identify patterns and relevant information. Our broad jurisdiction means we can provide this information to those who need it to make important decisions.’ This change to the way we work is reflected in our new role as part of the Working with Children Check (see page 90).

‘There are some areas where we have developed and maintained an ongoing involvement to ensure sustainable and long term improvements’ said the Ombudsman. This year we have:

- Continued to examine the implementation of reforms to the child protection system. **‘This is an area where, despite some positive developments, there is still clearly much more to do’** said the Ombudsman. **‘I will be reporting to Parliament again on this issue early in 2014’** (see page 84).
- Continued to review the way in which fines are administered (see pages 72-73).
- Continued to work with Aboriginal communities and service providers to develop practical and targeted solutions to service barriers (see page 106).
- Provided information and submissions on reforms to disability services at both the State and Federal level (see pages 97-99).
- Continued to monitor the use of segregation, separation and confinement in both adult and juvenile justice centres (see pages 63 and 65).

Regional and suburban references

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