



Morcombes lead way for children

Holly Brennan

THE Daniel Morcombe tragedy has meant that across Australia child protection is in the forefront of people's minds.

And they are talking about many aspects of Daniel's story; the fact that such cruelty exists and that a child on his way to buy presents for his family can be taken forever.

In the child-protection sector we are talking about how the Morcombe family looks beyond its loss and works to change the world for all children.

Statistics show a child is physically, emotionally or sexually abused every 12 minutes in Australia. The Australian Institute of Family Studies data shows there were 286,437 suspected cases of child abuse in Australia in 2009-2010. More than 46,000 cases involving 31,295 children - 6218 of them in Queensland - were proven.

The AIFS's National Child Protection Clearing House publishes the findings of numerous academic studies showing that up to 10 per cent of adult respondents report being physically abused as children and up to 17 per cent say they were emotionally abused.

A number of the studies also show high rates of sexual abuse, with one reporting up to 36 per cent of women surveyed claimed to have been sexually abused when young.

Perhaps more mind-blowing was the result of a National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect survey of 22,000 adults last year which found less than half would report suspected child abuse. Reasons included "not wanting to upset the parents", "being wrong" and "it's not my business".

The theme of Child Protection Week Queensland is: "Protecting children is everyone's business." And, as we pause to wish the best for the Morcombes, a

family touched directly by child abuse, it's important to understand two things.

One is a child is much more likely to be abused or neglected by someone they know than by a stranger - it is more likely to be a parent, step-parent, grandparent, coach, teacher, priest or fellow student abusing a child than the strange man in the trench coat.

Second, if you see signs of possible neglect or abuse, it is your business and there is a lot you can do to prevent a child being hurt.

We can all take the time to teach children how to be safe with other people, offline and online. We can observe signs something is wrong and listen to and believe children when they show or tell us what's going on.

If you're worried about a child, do something. This could mean actively observing a child; having gentle age-appropriate discussions with a child; using evidence-based resources in your childcare centre or school; or contacting child-safety services.

If you suspect a child is being harmed, report it.

From Sunday to September 11, thousands of people around Queensland will be involved in Child Protection Week activities which aim to start conversations about keeping children safe. The grim figures on child abuse are a national disgrace.

The conversation about what we can all do to help is one that everyone can join. If the Morcombes can do this, what's stopping the rest of us?

Holly Brennan is chairwoman of the Child Protection Week Queensland Committee.

If you suspect a child is being harmed, contact Child Safety on 1800 177 135 or, if a child is in immediate danger, phone the police on 000.