REPORTS on problems with Victoria's child protection system (The Age, 26/11, 27/11) do not mention that much of the work of caring for the most vulnerable is contracted out by the State Government to community organisations such as Anglicare, Berry Street and MacKillop Family Services.

Most youth workers employed by such organisations are paid according to the Social and Community Services - Victoria - Award 2000. Award entry-level wages for full-time (38 hours a week) youth workers trail behind adult average earnings by $574 a week. The highest rate of pay for youth workers under the award is $307 less per week than average weekly earnings. This makes it difficult for these agencies to retain skilled staff.

Child protection workers employed by the Victorian Department of Human Services can earn up to $2262 more a week than the highest rate of pay available to community sector youth workers, who could be working with the same clients. This could explain why the Government is keen to continue contracting out the work of caring for Victoria's abused and neglected young people.

If it is committed to a strong child protection system it will follow Queensland's example, where youth workers in the community sector obtained wage increases of up to 37 per cent.

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