

Bluey and Bingo have an ideal childhood but too many kids just get thrown a bone

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Kids' TV characters Bluey and Bingo are the poster kids for the childhood we all dream of for our little ones. Full of joy, love and play, these two curious and playful Blue Heeler pups are deeply loved by their parents Bandit and Chilli in a community of colourful and fun family and friends.

As a psychologist with a long career working with children and families, I can tell you that not all Aussie kids get the ideal "Bluey childhood".

According to this year's Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) Child Protection report, between 2021 and 2022 there were 45,500 children under the age of 18 who, after a child protection investigation, it was concluded were either being, or were at risk of being, maltreated in Australia.

From early on these kids learn the world is unsafe and that relationships can't be trusted, and this impacts all aspects of development.

You can't make friends if you are on a permanent state of alert – always scanning your environment for danger.

You can't trust your teacher if you have learnt that the people who are meant to care for you can harm you or those you love.

It's near impossible to feel the safety and comfort of being home if you're not sure you're going to sleep in the same bed you did last night.

This year's Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS) highlighted the devastating extent of child maltreatment, finding that 62.2% of the Australian population aged 16 years or older had experienced one or more types of maltreatment as a child (under 18 years), leaving lasting damage on individuals, families, and communities.

However, there is a silver lining on awful storm cloud. The same study showed a decrease in physical abuse finding the positive impact of primary prevention programs that focus on community behaviour change.

The last NSW budget included \$200 million to help our most vulnerable children, including getting them out of situations where they live with a rotating roster of carers or worse, in a hotel. This is a great start, but it focuses on the wrong end of the spectrum.

We need to be doing more to stop children finding themselves in crisis situations in the first place, yet as it currently stands the NSW government is investing a mere 10 per cent of total child protection funding into early intervention and prevention.

Ten per cent to do everything we can to prevent a child being removed from their family, the absolute crisis end of the system, which we know creates ripples of heartache and trauma for generations, while the other 90 per cent goes towards the kids and families who are already in it. This is unsustainable by any financial, policy or moral definition.

The government's per capita spending on early intervention and prevention should reflect our community's determination to protect children, and stave off a lifetime of consequences as a result of maltreatment. We heard during budget estimates that the Minister is committed to early intervention and prevention. Now we need to see the action.

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