



Darwin Asylum Seeker Support and Advocacy Network

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SERCO RUINS CHRISTMAS FOR CHILDREN IN DETENTION

The private corporation that runs Darwin's detention centres has ruined Christmas for some of the close to 200 children detained in Darwin detention centres.

The Darwin Asylum Seeker Support and Advocacy Network (DASSAN) together with ChilOut, an organisation which advocates for the rights of child asylum seekers, had organised for Christmas gifts to be delivered to children spending Christmas in Darwin detention centres. The gifts were purchased with donations given by members of the public throughout Australia and local Darwin businesses. Many people generously donated time, gifts and money as a way of showing children in detention that they are not forgotten.

On Christmas day, when DASSAN members arrived to give the gifts, as pre arranged with Serco, Serco staff informed DASSAN volunteers that the gifts could not be handed out as they were wrapped and needed to be checked to ensure that no contraband was contained in the gifts. As a result the DASSAN volunteers, which included three children who had given up their Christmas morning to show children in detention they cared about them, spent their time unwrapping the gifts they had wrapped the previous day. Volunteers were also informed that no children were to be given crayons or textas as "children might draw on the walls". Serco staff also informed volunteers that the gifts would have to be given to children based on their boat number and not their names as "they are easier to tick off that way". The presents were only handed out to the children today after Serco was instructed to do so by the Department of Immigration, following pressure from DASSAN.

DASSAN spokesperson, Rohan Thwaites, said "Christmas is a time of generosity and compassion, a time at which most children in Australia get a gift, and decent Australians

wanted to make sure that children who were locked up, having committed no crime, got a gift too." Mr Thwaites added, "In 2011, the numbers of suicide attempts and self harm incidents in Darwin detention centres could be counted in their hundreds. Children inside Darwin detention centres are regularly exposed to these horrific incidents. Serco seems to care little about children being exposed to these sorts of incidents but is obviously very worried about crayons being taken to a child's room or the dangers posed by a wrapped Christmas gift".

Mr Thwaites added, "The Australian Government and the Australian public have known for years about the catastrophic effects of detaining children in immigration detention. Children should not be in detention where their care is dictated by poorly trained security guards. The Christmas gift giving fiasco is just a small example of this. Children should be living in the community so they can begin to recover from the trauma they have fled from - detention centres only inflict further trauma."

For media comment: Rohan Thwaites, DASSAN: 0402555841.