

COMING FORWARD One third of those who presented to new centres are children

A reason why abuse reporting has risen

Matt Maloney

ONE third of Tasmanians who have reported sexual offences over 2023-24 at the state's two multidisciplinary sexual assault support centres have been children.

The state government has committed more than \$20 million for the establishment of Arch centres in the North, South, and North-West. While the centres have been operational in Hobart and Launceston since 2023, the third is yet to open.

The centres were developed to provide immediate support and safety services, counselling and specialist police investigators to sexual abuse and family violence victims at the one location.

At a parliamentary inquiry on the government's progress on Commission of Inquiry recommendations, Police Minister Felix Ellis said 267 people affected by sexual harm had accessed one of

the two centres. He said 91 of these were children.

Mr Ellis said due to the nature of the services provided at the Arch centres, he believed an increase in the reporting of sexual assault was indicative of people believing it was safe to report abuse, rather than an increase in abuse incidences.

"As much as it's been devastating to see the number of reports increasing when it comes to sexual violence, we know that there was such a huge level of under-reporting in the past because people didn't feel comfortable coming forward in a range of different ways," he said.

Tasmania Police Assistant Commissioner Robert Blackwood said a precise location for the North-West Arch centre was yet to be confirmed.

"It's really important with our other service providers that we get the location right," he said. "We've looked at about 32 different proper-

ties at the moment, and we believe we're getting close to getting one right."

Mr Ellis said data collection for an initial assessment of the success of the two operating Arch centres commenced last month.

Nelson independent MLC Meg Webb asked how children in state care, including those in the Ashley Youth Detention Centre, were made aware of Arch services.

Tasmania Police Commissioner Donna Adams said this was largely done through support service providers.

"And if you refer back to the Commission of Inquiry's recommendation, they've been very specific that they want Tasmania Police to have dedicated effort in building those relationships and having the awareness and information, so that they do know how to come forward and that there is those established relationships of trust," she said.



More than 260 people affected by sexual harm had accessed one of the two Arch centres in Launceston and Hobart over 12 months to July.