

# The Sydney Morning Herald

## Children's charity subcontracted services to company part-run by convicted murderer

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A charity that looked after the state's most traumatised children 24 hours a day in return for millions of dollars in public funding subcontracted large parts of its operations to a company co-directed by a convicted murderer.

The agreement has been revealed in a creditors report obtained by Fairfax Media, which found the financially troubled Guardian Youth Care charity had faced allegations of "potential inappropriate financial dealings".



*Glen Ella, the former Wallaby, has acted as the chief executive of a charity under investigation by the government over its spending.*

But former Labor powerbroker Graham Richardson has ardently defended the care provider on Sky News, blaming the NSW government for its insolvency risk.

Guardian Youth Care, which counts former Wallaby Glen Ella as its chief executive, called in administrators last week to salvage a company that received \$30 million in funding over five years.

The move came seven days before its funding was due to run out. It follows questions from Fairfax Media, which revealed the charity borrowed more than \$1 million from companies with links to criminals.

In their report to creditors, administrators BRI Ferrier said the charity and the Department of Family Community Services were locked in "long running disputes."

"There appear to be allegations of compliance failures, conflicts of interest and potential inappropriate financial dealings on the part of the company," the administrators wrote.

BRI Ferrier director John Keenan said Guardian Youth Care appeared insolvent but preliminary investigations had found no evidence of misdealings.



*Roy Bijkerk served as a director of Alpha Support Services, the company contracted to provide care for the wards of Guardian Youth Care.*

The administrators are negotiating with the Department of Families and Community Services as it moves children to new accommodation.

"FACS continues to seek to verify that Guardian Youth Care's funds have been used in accordance with our contracts," a spokesman said.



*Former Labor powerbroker Graham Richardson defended Guardian Youth Care on air.*

Roy Bijkerk, convicted in 1999 of conspiring to import cocaine, helped found the charity and has served as a director of Alpha Support Services, the company contracted to provide its care.

Ned Bikic, who was sentenced to 11 years' jail for murder in 2001, served as a director of Alpha Support Services alongside members of Mr Bijkerk's family from 2015 to 2016.



*Ned Bikic was sentenced in 2001 to a minimum 11-year jail term for murder. Photo: Ken James*

While the charity took responsibility for payroll expenses, the Alpha company "provided all other operations and services", the administrators reported.

"This arrangement has been subject to some scrutiny by FACS over recent time," they said.



*Samantha Madigan, who describes herself as Guardian Youth Care's executive administrator. Photo: Facebook*

Guardian Youth Care wrote off more than \$500,000 in government funding last year as a "doubtful debt", unlikely to be repaid.

But before that it had borrowed \$1 million from entities such as Alpha Support Services, last year's annual report shows. It also listed nearly \$700,000 as a loan extended to an entity called Alpha Support.

On his Sky News show, Mr Richardson said the government had starved the charity of funds and housed high-risk and low-risk children together, allowing "the virus" of bad behaviour to spread.

"Guardian Youth Care have taken on the Department of Family and Community Services in NSW, and they've taken them on in, in my view, a righteous cause," he said.

Mr Richardson said Mr Bijkerk had immediately told him about his criminal past when they met years ago and that FACS had thwarted his ability to give back to the community.

Mr Bijkerk's son Dylan appeared on the *Richo* show to say FACS had continuously withheld funds, prompting companies connected to his father to lend money for wages.

The \$4.2 million listed as simply "management fees" in last year's accounts was spent on "every overhead of the service", including rent, training and food for the children, he said.

The Minister for Family and Community Services, Pru Goward, said she was aware of an investigation by her department into Guardian Youth Care and supported it.

Mr Ella has signed off on the charity's accounts for the past three years and serves as its secretary and CEO, according to the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat.

He and other directors of Guardian Youth Care contacted by Fairfax Media did not respond to questions. Neither did Roy Bijkerk or Mr Bikic.

The department informed the charity in March it would not receive funding beyond this financial year and this week moved more than a dozen children into new accommodation.