



Family Inclusion Network

Input from Parents – Queensland Residential Care System Review

6 October 2023

Background

On 10 July 2023, the Hon Craig Crawford, MP, Minister for Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services announced a review of the State’s residential care system to be led by the Director-General of the Department.

“In Queensland, the Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services partners with non-government organisations to provide care arrangements for children and young people in out-of-home care.

The residential care system operates in a challenging environment of growing demand, increased complexity of family needs, and pressure across other care service options, such as foster care.” ([Queensland Government Get Involved site](#)).

The review seeks to respond to the shared concerns held by the Department, non-government organisations and the community about current care arrangements.

Opportunities for input into the review have included the Queensland government’s “Get Involved” consultation site, discussion forums, ‘workshops and knowledge circles’, site visits, and a roundtable. The aim is to report back by the end of the year.

Family Inclusion Network

Valuing children. Partnering with families. Embracing Diversity

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Family Inclusion Network facilitates opportunities for parents to be advocates for children and themselves. We resource parents and extended family members to participate and have a voice in the policies and services impacting on the lives of their children, family and community.

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About the Family Inclusion Network (FIN), Southeast Queensland

Family Inclusion Network (FIN), Southeast Queensland is a network of parents and their allies working to improve the child protection and family support system.

FIN brings together parents with lived (and living) experience, with government and non-government agencies, to work collaboratively on policies and issues that affect families experiencing the child protection system.

The Family Inclusion Network is an activity of Micah Projects.

Input sought from parents

Parents views have been sought in a number of ways.

1. *The government's "Get Involved" consultation site*: FIN promoted this site, though FIN would not be aware if parents responded.
2. *FIN email request to parents*: FIN invited parent members to respond directly to FIN regarding the government's five questions. FIN offered an anonymous collection of responses in an online 'form'. FIN also received direct emails and offered phone calls with some parents who preferred to discuss their input.
3. *Video Focus Group*: On 20 September, the Department's consultant held one video focus group conversation with three parent members of FIN. (FINseq asked for an additional date, mindful that FIN Townsville and parents in the regions would have valuable input.) FIN does not have a full summary of the 20 September parent focus group, however some key points are included in this paper.
4. *Minister's Residential Care Review Roundtable*: On 28 September, Micah Projects' CEO, and FIN Coordinator were able to attend the *Minister's Residential Care Review Roundtable* alongside approximately 60 other attendees including representatives from government, residential care workers and management, peak organisations, academics, and care leavers with lived-experience of residential care.

Method of collating

This paper collates direct input from FIN parent members who were able to respond to the consultation questions, or were able to communicate their views to FIN within the timeframe.

The input is ordered according to the government's questions, and how the parents chose to enter their responses. The content has not been analysed nor themed by FIN.

The input has been changed in small ways to ensure it is de-identified (including using gender-neutral terms as a further way to address the concerns parents express about repercussions if they speak up). The input has also been re-ordered to further assist with anonymity.

A small number of comments were removed if they were considered by FIN to have language or content inappropriate for a consultation response paper. In places, several comments were very similar and these have been reduced.

Input from Parents – Queensland Residential Care System Review

Opening statement from FIN Southeast Queensland

As the Queensland Residential Care System Review has progressed, updates have been communicated, via various channels, from the Queensland Commission for Families and Children (QFCC) and peak organisations such as PeakCare.

These updates state variously that **300-500 stakeholders** have been consulted (to end September).

This paper, collated by FIN Southeast Queensland, delivers the views of **11 parents**. (As previously stated, there may be more parents who have responded via the government’s consultation site.)

The views and suggestions of these 11 parents are insightful, pragmatic, and empathetic – parents hold a unique place in systemic reviews.

With parents’ views in such minority, it is difficult not to conclude that, despite enormous strides forward in the past five years, “the system” continues to have a bias and a value set that does not acknowledge parents and families as stakeholders in their children’s lives.

Consultation questions and responses

Some parents told FIN that the consultation questions were hard to understand and they “didn’t know how to respond”.

As previously stated, below are parents’ responses (via FIN) to the government’s questions. The content has not been analysed nor themed by FIN due to time and resource constraints.

1. What **models** of support do you think work best to meet the needs of children and young people living in residential care?

“1 week on & 1 week off.”

“No co-tenanting with other genders. No male workers at night with teenage girls.”

“There is absolutely nothing good, not one redeeming feature of the Resi model.”

“My child was in residential care where the carers were shift workers and often left. [My child] never had the opportunity to relate to the workers or co-tenants. [They] hated resi and frequently ran away. [They have] complex PTSD and severe attachment issues.”

“Age brackets: no young ones with teenagers.”

“I don’t believe any model of Resi “care” works best. They don’t care at all.”

“Residential care makes very little attempt to deal with these problems and the workers are not trained to deal with difficult issues. While in residential [my child] got involved in drugs and alcohol because [they] would run away with other people [they] met in resi and would end up in drug houses.”

“Resi has been good for my child. There was a lot of trauma behaviour. It's 24/7 with [their] behaviour and needs to be watched and responded to. They need to be monitored and it's not compatible with the realistic lifestyle of a lot of homes – not the parent’s home, nor in a foster carer home. At the end of the work, the team of carers can then go home to a safe place of their own to re-group.”

“Resi is the dumping ground for special needs kids who are loved by their family ...”

“For me it's the 1 week on, 1 week off model of care. My children have been in both models and this model helped them to develop bonds with the carers and this in turn helped them in their everyday lives.”

“No kids should be in resi. It's not culturally appropriate.”

2. What changes do you think could be made to improve the residential care system overall?

“A psychologist as part of the care team and a lawyer for each child.”

“More interaction with the child's family. More of a co-parenting situation. I have been extremely isolated as a parent when the carers do everything for my children, I have no input.”

“No more “case managers” who are inexperienced and have no idea deciding what is best.”

“Communication. Department guidelines say this should occur but in reality it does not.”

“18 months of my child in Resi and we’ve never even met the Resi Youth Workers”

“A family room. A space, whether it's outdoor, whether it's indoor, that we can visit. Like a normal home. Kids having that stability of being able to have people over – and everyone being connected.”

“There's this lack of communication when decisions are too hard by carers or care managers, they'll tell you to go back to child safety services offices... you get thrown like a like a tennis ball, one side of the court to the other, to the point where your children are so frustrated and so upset and they do act out.”

“Co-parenting – with the parents and family to ease the trauma and transitions”

“They refuse to engage with schools and children don’t even meet 20% school attendance. They won’t take children to medical appointments, and worst of all they actively interfere with family reunification planning, goal setting and tasks.”

“There needs to be one person, a mentor or a navigator that is able to be there in the middle. Some independent person that can communicate quickly and clearly with all of us.”

“I believe residential care as it is today is most unsatisfactory. There is very little understanding amongst carers and little or no effective training. Children in care are by definition damaged. Many of the children have come from violent homes and have been exposed to lifestyles which are damaging. These kids feed off each other and without the skills necessary to help them staff burn out very quickly.”

“More security checks on carers and unannounced drop in visits to ensure that the carers are doing their jobs and children and young people are receiving the proper care.”

3. What do you think makes a residential care service good for young people living there?

“Nothing. Nobody should live in a residential care home let alone a child. Essentially: Nothing.”

“Good relationships with the carers. A good match with co-tenants. The child feels safe and heard and that they don't feel trapped or 'in jail' like my children have described it.”

“There is and can be nothing good about such scenarios.”

4. How do you think services/systems can better work together to meet the needs of children and young people in residential care?


“Being placed with a foster carer is one thing but being placed in resi care, when there are 24/7 carers that continually change, would be so overwhelming for a child, particularly a young child and the Department just expect them to cope. Parents, grandparents, other family and friends could all be a part of ongoing emotional and mental scaffolding surrounding a child in care, particularly resi care.”

“There has to be a better way of helping children when they are in such a vulnerable state. In a way they are treated like they have done something wrong - at least this is how they perceive it. There needs to be a thorough rethink of how children get treated at each step. Can parents be involved?”

“Training, training and more training. I also believe workers need to be properly compensated for what, if done effectively, can be not only difficult but rewarding as well.”

“Parents should have a right to know the names of all carers including respite carers and the names of who is a part of the pyjama foundation.”

“Workers need to be given the tools necessary to help them to understand the varied and complicated issues that kids in residential care have faced. I also feel that there needs to be much stricter processes for employing workers. It's a difficult job and when the government is only concerned with policies and procedures humanity doesn't seem to matter.”



“Get feedback from the families of these children, [the children] do tell us things that they wouldn't necessarily tell others.”

“You need a lot more support once [the children] have come back. They need ongoing therapy to repair and to help with the life skills they've missed.”

“There is no way to improve or repair a burned out car which crashed into a brick wall. This is only improved by melting it down for scrap and cleaning up the mess from the devastation of the car wreck.”

“Loving parents can be supported in some way by other early supports and other things rather than resi. But it seems that the default seems to be “well, you're not good at all”.”

“Reduce the strict rules around who can visit etc to make it more family friendly - contact could happen at their house for example. I didn't get to see my kids houses as I wasn't allowed to go there.”

“Having family visit is an important step. I have been treated very badly by some of these carers - they need to understand the trauma associated with removal from a family and how it disrupts the family relationships. They should be a part of re-creating those bonds.”

“A different way of looking at that money and spending. Financially it would be better to support families with live-in carers. Better care. Less traumatic. Saves money.”

“The Department needs to help children adjust better to putting them with strangers. The children just have to forget all the things they have been told about ‘stranger danger’ and just deal. I have been told by my children how scary this is for them and that when they cried they weren't comforted, they were just told to deal with it because you are going to be here for a very long time.”

“From that first moment, can there be an initial handover involving the parents? Even though it would be extremely difficult for all involved.”

“The children and their mental and emotional health and wellbeing should be everyone's top priority. They are the victims. They need to have emotional support throughout this very difficult process and they should be entitled to receive information about what's happening to them.”

“They need counselling. When children receive counselling in foster care, they say it's for the trauma that they received when they were at home. But my child received trauma in care. And the counselling's not there – during care or after reunification.”

5. Do you have any other feedback that can help inform the review?

“Have a completely different approach to child protection in general. Putting carers into our homes instead of a residential could help that family and particularly the child significantly. These children are so changed by their experiences that they often go into youth crime and have worse life outcomes because of these early life experiences. We need to do better as a state to ensure that these children don't fall through the cracks but instead get proper support to help them thrive.”

“My child got told by the CSO about their human rights (which I strongly agree with and have taught my child). Then they said "your parents have no rights" ... none of the adults have rights or are respected.”

“I can't tell you what works well because residential care failed my child at every turn. I have been left with a child who won't leave [their] room because [they don't] feel safe anywhere out of [their] room and the system has turned [them] into a very angry teenager”

“Send home all those kids with caring and diligent involved parents and stop torturing them and their communities and families.”

“No one is in charge. There are no adults: the parents have no say. And the workers are stuck with too many rules and red tape. They can't say no to the kids. Or stop them from hurting themselves.”

“Advocates are supposed to actually support us.. All children in these nightmare homes, need to be released, to their parents, or kin.. Not all children were abused, or neglected..”

[end]