

# Principal Commissioner's report

This annual report provides detail on the many achievements and successes of the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) in 2020–21. I am very proud of the work we have continued to deliver, especially given the challenging times in which it has been undertaken. Despite the ongoing challenges COVID-19 presented, the QFCC continued to carry out meaningful and influential work to protect the rights of children and young people in Queensland.

A refreshed strategic agenda saw us place further emphasis on bringing children's rights to life and on ensuring that every child is safe, with opportunities to succeed. We are pursuing this by raising awareness of the rights of young Queenslanders, advocating for what matters to them and holding to account the systems responsible for the safety and wellbeing of our most vulnerable children and young people.

We have adapted and evolved during the past 12 months, making sure the voices of more young Queenslanders are being heard on issues that matter to them.

This annual report highlights our work on responding to and preventing the deaths of children and our ongoing engagement with our partners and colleagues on issues that matter to children, young people and families.

The year began with the establishment of the new independent Child Death Review Board (the Board) on 1 July 2020. I now hold the position of Chair of the Board in addition to my role as Principal Commissioner. Hosted by the QFCC, the Board carries out reviews following the death of a child who was known to the child protection system. It makes recommendations for improvements to legislation, mechanisms and systems, policies and practices intended to prevent the deaths of children that may have been avoidable.

Throughout the year, we continued to build on our strong and valuable work in overseeing the child protection and youth justice systems.

In September, we completed *Seeing they are safe*, a report on the responsiveness of the statutory child protection system to reports of harm to a child. We presented this to ministers and government agencies involved in investigating and assessing reports of child harm.

We also released *Changing the sentence: overseeing Queensland's youth justice reforms*, which was an oversight review of the Queensland Government's *Youth Justice Strategy*. The report assessed reforms against child rights, wellbeing, and safety and included 13 findings and eight opportunities for future investment. It brought together interviews of frontline service providers, families and children in Brisbane, Townsville and Mount Isa and included a media analysis and an in-depth look at three reform initiatives.

This year, we started our *Principle Focus* program, to help address the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the statutory child protection systems. *Principle Focus* will monitor, evaluate and review the effective application of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.<sup>1</sup> We have also begun a review to assess the safety of children subject to an intervention with parental agreement (which is when a child's parents agree to work cooperatively with Child Safety to keep their child safe).

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<sup>1</sup> Under the *Child Protection Act 1999* this principle must be considered when placing an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child or young person in the child protection system. The five core elements of the Principle are Prevention, Partnership, Connection, Placement and Participation.

In April 2021, we launched *Voices of Hope: Growing Up in Queensland 2020*. This report outlined the views of more than 8,000 children and young people (aged 4–18) about their communities, their hopes and the issues that are important to them. These young people told us they would like more youth-friendly spaces in their communities, they hope for further education and employment, and they called for more action from leaders on mental health, education and the environment.

In addition, the government tasked us with undertaking a culturally appropriate community conversation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people about their interaction with the justice system. We have begun work on this.

*Talking Families*, our initiative for engaging with parents, continues to form relationships and partnerships with schools and services to embed parenting support messages. Currently, more than 175 schools and early childhood services deliver the *Talking Families* initiative across 15 Family and Child Connect<sup>2</sup> regions in Queensland.

This is also my last annual report after more than six years in the role of Chief Executive and Principal Commissioner of the Queensland Family and Child Commission.

I want to acknowledge the contribution of all staff who worked for the QFCC over the years. They continued to adapt and grow during times of uncertainty, meeting the many challenges they faced with an unwavering commitment to help protect the rights, safety and wellbeing of children and young people in Queensland. I also want to thank the many partners who worked alongside us.

The 2021–22 financial year will be no less challenging, but with these people and a strong strategic agenda, we will continue to make a difference for Queensland's children and young people.



**Cheryl Vardon**

*Chief Executive and Principal Commissioner*  
Queensland Family and Child Commission

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<sup>2</sup> Family and Child Connect are Queensland-wide, community-based referral services intended to enable families experiencing vulnerability to be assessed and linked with local services (for example, parenting or adult mental health services) that best meet their needs.