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Reference: OoC - F19/896 - D19/16600



The Honourable Ronald Sackville AO QC
Chair
Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and
Exploitation of People with Disability
GPO Box 1422
BRISBANE QLD 4001

Queensland
Family & Child
Commission

Dear Mr Sackville

Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability

I am writing to you in response to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Royal Commission) public request for feedback into the *Draft Accessibility Strategy*.

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) is an independent oversight body working to improve the child protection and family support systems in Queensland. We have functions to promote the safety, well-being and best interests of children and young people, and advocate for the protection and care of children and young people, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

As part of the work we do, the QFCC advocates for the voices of children and young people to be heard:

- Children and young people are vulnerable to abuse and neglect due to their reliance on others for care and support.
- Children and young people are less likely to complain, and when they do, their complaints are less likely to be taken seriously.
- many children and young people do not know how to make a formal complaint or who to complain to.

The QFCC is concerned children and young people, and particularly children with disability may be limited in their capacity to provide information to the Royal Commission. Due to their age, lack of experience and immaturity, many children and young people would not have the skill or ability to respond to the Royal Commission, notwithstanding the impact of any disability.

- Many children and young people do not know what constitutes violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation.
- Many children and young people with disability rely on parents and immediate family members as their primary care givers. The inherent power imbalance of this relationship may inhibit a child from speaking up due to fear of punishment or removal of essential services.
- Some children and young people with disability have trouble communicating because of their disability and need additional age-appropriate support to express their concerns.

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I urge the Royal Commission to consider the ability of children and young people to participate and be heard in the submission process and consider how to reach those children and young people who are most vulnerable. This includes young children, children and young people living in out of home care, in youth detention, who are homeless, or living in rural and remote areas, as well as children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. Without the opportunity to participate their vulnerability is deepened.

To this end, the QFCC will be supporting young people represented on our Youth Advisory Council to drive our submission to the Royal Commission. Through this process we will also endeavor to provide support to other children and young people who may indicate an interest in putting forth a submission to inform your deliberations.

If you or your officers have any queries in relation to this matter, they may contact [REDACTED], Director Office of the Commissioners on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely



Cheryl Vardon
Principal Commissioner
Queensland Family and Child Commission

21 AUG 2019