

## Objective Three

# Empower children, young people and their families to influence decisions that affect their lives

Empowering children and families to share their stories is critical – to ensure the accuracy and integrity of our work, and to let others know they are not alone in their experiences. To deliver this, we work to amplify the voices of Queensland children and their families by:

- engaging with children, young people and families in purposeful, ethical and inclusive ways
- gathering and using the perspectives of Queensland’s children and young people to inform and influence the decisions made by government.

This aligns with our responsibilities, under the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* to engage with, and take account of, the views of children, young people and their families and uphold the rights of children to participate in decision-making that affects their lives.

## Youth participation framework and model of participation

In October 2021, we published our Model of Participation and Youth Participation Quick Start Guide. These documents detail how the QFCC connects with, supports and amplifies the voices of young Queenslanders to influence change. We also released a new Youth Participation Framework of Practice in June 2022 with a commission-wide approach to youth participation best practice. While all our work seeks to enable the meaningful participation of children and young people, 3 key engagement mechanisms used in 2021–22 were the:

- *Growing up in Queensland: Living through COVID* project
- *Families are first* initiative
- QFCC Youth Advisory Council.

## Growing up in Queensland: Living through COVID

This survey of 1,542 Queenslanders aged 13–18 years was undertaken over a 4-week period in October 2021. *Living through COVID*<sup>171</sup> aimed to:

- examine the impact of lockdowns
- collect the suggestions of young people about how government and community leaders could best communicate to them about the pandemic.

The survey found:<sup>172</sup>

- Worst things about the COVID lockdowns were:
  - not seeing friends or family (33%)
  - remote learning (27%)
  - recreational impacts (13%).

- Best things about the COVID lockdowns were:
  - enhanced appreciation of personal freedom (45%)
  - enjoyment of home schooling (40%)
  - increased appreciation of friends (39%)
  - increased appreciation of schooling (28%)
  - increased closeness to family (27%).
- Suggested improvements to the government’s COVID communication were:
  - communication tailored to young people (13%)
  - being more reassuring and positive when providing information (12%)
  - provision of clear communication (11%).

## Families are first

*Families are first* is a QFCC initiative that celebrates strong, proud, and thriving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. It shows the strengths of everyday community members and the roles they play in their own families, extended families and the community. It provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families a platform to share their successes and challenges, which in turn challenges the often-negative perceptions in the wider community. Since the program began in 2016, it has collected 60 stories from participants from far north, north and south-east Queensland. These stories have been shared through our social media platforms and promoted online and through community radio. The *Families are first* web page and YouTube channel host 32 video stories.

During 2021–22, we have:

- established strong relationships with communities and key stakeholders including:
  - Elder groups, such as Inala Elders Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation and Cherbourg Elders
  - Brian Kerle and the Young Indigenous Basketball Academy
  - Triple A Murri Radio
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service
  - Kurbingui Youth Development Ltd
  - QATSICPP
  - Goolburri Aboriginal Health Advancement.
- captured 8 stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, families, and young people—these stories have been produced into 11 videos posted on QFCC social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube
- collaborated with QATSICPP to generate awareness of the family-led decision-making process in youth justice—stories were captured from staff from 3 community-controlled organisations and shared on QFCC social media platforms over 3 weeks
- developed a collaborative working relationship with Triple A Murri Radio to co-develop a project that allows young people’s voices to be heard—the 5-week pilot project called ‘An introduction to multimedia platforms as a form of storytelling’ provides young people with a basic understanding of technologies to create and share their stories (the first pilot project was delivered over 5 weeks from April 2022).

## Young, Black and Proud scholarships

In 2021–22, through a partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service, the QFCC sponsored 17 Young, Black and Proud scholarships. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people under the age of 25, from a range of backgrounds were provided small scholarships (\$1,000–\$2,000) to follow their academic, arts and sports dreams.

## Youth Advisory Council

The QFCC's Youth Advisory Council champions the voices of children and young people and provides youth perspectives and leadership to the QFCC.

The council meets regularly and provides advice to the commissioners and the QFCC on what is important to children and young people in Queensland. It works with other young people to identify important issues, then it designs and implements responses to address them.

The council has up to 25 members, with a current active membership of 21 young people aged between 14 and 25. Members, known as 'youth advocates', have diverse backgrounds and represent regional and metropolitan areas. In 2021–22, youth advocates contributed advice to:

- Mental Health Select Committee – 7 youth advocates participated in parliamentary hearings and provided input into the QFCC submission in February and March 2022
- ANROWS conference – 4 youth advocates co-designed and delivered a workshop around youth participation practice in February 2022
- Human Rights Commission Roundtable – 3 youth advocates and 2 youth researchers participated in February 2022
- Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce – 4 youth advocates provided input into the QFCC submission, and 6 youth advocates met with the taskforce
- Safer pathways through childhood strategy – 4 youth advocates consulted with the Child Death Prevention team
- YMCA Youth Parliament – youth advocates contributed to the Youth Acts tabled at this year's program.

The QFCC Commissioner, and 3 youth advocates attended the Queensland Indigenous Youth Leadership Program to connect with 35 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people from across Queensland. They introduced the QFCC's work and led a discussion on the different concerns participants had for their communities. Feedback from this session will help inform future engagement activities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

In recognition of the value of their contributions, the QFCC facilitates youth advocate participation in various internal and external opportunities including conferences, stakeholder events and media opportunities. Youth advocates also receive professional development and guidance during their tenure, particularly in relation to communication and advocacy skills. A current list of youth advocates can be found on our website.<sup>173</sup>

## Community engagement

### Queensland Child Protection Week (5–11 September 2021)

The QFCC Principal Commissioner attended the *Queensland Child Protection Week Award* ceremony and presented the 2021 Regional Program Award to *Safe Connections – Early Years Linkages Project*. This project aims to improve outcomes for families in the Moreton region that are experiencing domestic and family violence and associated child protection issues. Details of award winners are available online.<sup>174</sup>

### NAIDOC community events (19–24 September 2021)

QFCC staff attended the Logan and Ipswich NAIDOC community events in September 2021 providing an opportunity to engage with children, their families and community through fun, family-based activities.

## Yarning for change

In response to a Queensland Government 2020 election commitment, the QFCC is facilitating culturally appropriate community conversations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children about their interactions with the justice system. We began engaging with young people in Redcliffe, Logan, Caboolture, Ipswich, Inala and all 3 of the youth detention centres. Between March and June 2022, the project team commenced engagement in regional areas including Townsville, Cairns, Mackay and Mt Isa. To date the QFCC has spoken with 89 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. A final report will be presented to the Attorney-General by September 2022, meeting the election commitment.

## Talking Families

In 2021–22, we continued with *Talking Families*, a community education initiative designed to reduce stigma and instil confidence in parents about seeking support with the stresses of parenting. *Talking Families* was designed to assist parents to seek help early before problems escalate. 182 schools and services that signed on to the program were supported by their local Family and Child Connect service.

A survey of over 900 stakeholders, including parents, schools and services delivering the program, indicated that the needs of families had changed, and the program was no longer meeting requirements. In response, the QFCC closed *Talking Families* on 30 June 2022. The QFCC will work with parenting organisations in 2022–23 to deliver practical and relevant information to Queensland families.

## *oneplace* community services directory

The *oneplace* website was an online directory of Queensland community services provided by the QFCC. It was implemented in 2015 in response to a recommendation of the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry. Usage of *oneplace* has declined over time, despite ongoing investment in promotion. Trend data suggests that Queenslanders are using other means to find local family support. In response, the QFCC closed *oneplace* on 30 June 2022.

Queensland parents and carers can continue to seek family and parenting support through the Queensland Government's Family and Child Connect program, which offers free, unlimited and confidential advice to families and connects them to practical support. Queenslanders can also continue to search for community services through a national database operated by not-for-profit Infoxchange, which includes all services formerly listed on *oneplace*. The QFCC will promote these initiatives throughout 2022–23.