



Rights, Voices, Stories

summary report:

*Identifying what matters to children
and young people involved with
the Queensland child
protection system*

HOME

About the project

We, the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) youth researchers, are excited to share the work we've been doing to identify what matters to children in out-of-home care and to work towards more positive outcomes for them.

Between the 11 of us, we have more than one hundred different placement experiences in foster care, kinship care, residential care, boarding school, supported independent living, self-placing and homelessness. Some of our experiences were positive, but most were negative.

While our experiences have been diverse, what we have in common is that we don't want others to go through the negative things we went through—it's as simple as that.

We want a different future for kids in care.

We want a future where there isn't such a vast difference in outcomes between kids in care and kids living at home with their parents. Where kids in care have the same opportunities as every other child in Queensland, and more kids have a positive experience in care.

We want a future where kids in care are heard when they speak up. Where they are believed, understood, and helped to solve problems and make their circumstances better.

If nothing changes, nothing changes.

Change will not happen unless we can pass the microphone and empower children and young people with a care experience to share their stories, experiences and hardships.

We are working on this project because we want to help kids in care say what needs to be said to the people who need to hear it. We want to hold people, and systems, to account for doing what needs to be done to make things better.

We want to lead real change. The Queensland child protection system can and must do better.

QFCC youth researchers

Aimee, Brittany, Caroline, Grace, James, Janice, Jesse, Lucas, Marie, Miriel and Terry

The QFCC's role in oversight of the system is about more than just monitoring what systems report—it's about measuring what matters. Who better to determine what matters than the people who rely on the system to keep them safe and well?

When we think about children's right to participate in decisions that affect them, we are interested in decisions about their individual circumstances. But we also want to empower them to influence decisions at the system level and outcomes for other children and young people, so they can shape the system that has been built to promote their safety and wellbeing.

That's why it's so important that the youth researchers took the lead on this project. **They spoke. We listened. Now it's time to act.**



Cheryl Vardon
Chief Executive and
Principal Commissioner



Natalie Lewis
Commissioner

Project summary

There is a tendency, when measuring the effectiveness of programs, to assess input (resources invested) and output (for example, how many services are provided and how many people access them). While this is important information, it doesn't measure the impact or outcomes of the services.

Recommendation 8 of *Keeping Queensland's children more than safe: Review of the foster care system*—required the system to provide a more outcomes-based account 'of the experiences and perspective of children and young people who rely on child protection services to stay safe and well'.¹

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) is working with the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs; the Office of the Public Guardian and the child protection sector to respond to this recommendation.

A team of 11 youth researchers with previous out-of-home care experience or understanding worked on the *Rights, Voices, Stories* project.

This project aims to highlight where the rights of children are not being upheld. It will use their voices to tell the stories that are important to them, to advocate for system change.

The QFCC will monitor and report on these issues.

Our rights matter is the name of the framework developed by the QFCC's youth researchers. It identifies what matters to children and young people, including:

- **identity**—Children and young people know where they're from and why they are involved in the child protection system, and are helped to work out who they are.
- **stability**—Even though their living arrangements might change, children and young people have stability in other areas of their lives and relationships.

- **health and wellbeing**—Children and young people have their health and wellbeing needs taken seriously and addressed.
- **feeling safe and loved**—Children and young people feel safe, secure and loved as they grow.
- **equity and fairness**—Children and young people are treated like others in the family home, and are supported in developing into adulthood in the same ways their peers are.

Systems and individuals within those systems need to be held accountable for upholding the rights of children and young people they are involved with. They also need to be held accountable when needs are not met.

The QFCC, together with the youth researchers, will:

- start gathering data to monitor these issues
- recommend improvements to enhance the experiences of children and young people involved with the Queensland child protection system
- follow up with relevant agencies about progress in implementing recommendations and any evidence of improvement.

The QFCC will also report annually on data collected for the project, including the status of the recommendations that will come from it.

¹ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2017), *Keeping Queensland's children more than safe: Review of the foster care system*, https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/final_report_FC_review.pdf

What matters to children and young people involved with the Queensland child protection system

As the issues identified through *Rights, Voices, Stories* relate to rights, they are presented under the heading *Our rights matter*. Accountability for rights was also important, and underpins the framework summarised in this infographic.

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE MUST BE SUPPORTED to KNOW THEIR RIGHTS & HOW to FIGHT for THEM

OUR RIGHTS MATTER

MY VOICE IS the SOURCE of TRUTH!

IDENTITY

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE KNOW WHO they ARE, WHERE they ARE FROM & HAVE A POSITIVE SENSE of SELF IDENTITY & HAVE SELF-ESTEEM. THEIR INVOLVEMENT WITH the CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM DOES NOT DEFINE them.

EARLY ACCESS to BIRTH CERTIFICATE & OTHER IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

PHOTOS THROUGHOUT LIFE

HELPED to UNDERSTAND WHY they WERE INVOLVED WITH the CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

SUPPORTED to UNDERSTAND CULTURE, & the CHILD/YOUNG PERSON CHOOSES IF/HOW to BE INVOLVED

FULL ACCESS to FILES

RESPECTED AS AN INDIVIDUAL

SAFE to EXPLORE GENDER IDENTITY, SEXUAL ORIENTATION & SPIRITUALITY

STABILITY

WHILE their LIVING ARRANGEMENTS MAY CHANGE, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE STABILITY in OTHER AREAS of their LIVES. THEY ARE SUPPORTED to MAINTAIN CONNECTIONS THAT ARE IMPORTANT to THEM.

PROVIDE COMFORT & SENSE of CONTROL of OWN SITUATION

STAY AT the SAME school, EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION & CARE PROVIDER

CONSISTENCY of HEALTH CARE PROVIDER & SUPPORT SERVICES

CONSISTENCY of CASE MANAGEMENT

KEEP SENTIMENTAL POSSESSIONS

DECISIONS TAKE DEVELOPMENTAL AGE & INSTABILITY into ACCOUNT

FINDING & MAINTAINING A HOBBY or INTEREST to PROVIDE A SENSE of CONNECTION

SUPPORTED to MAINTAIN DESIRED SOCIAL, SIBLING & FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

CONSISTENT, TRUSTED PEOPLE AVAILABLE for ADVICE & SUPPORT

ADEQUATELY PREPARED for CHANGES with AN OPPORTUNITY to INFLUENCE DECISIONS

MAINTAINING A CONNECTION to RELIGIOUS or CULTURAL GROUPS

HEALTH & WELLBEING

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE THEIR MENTAL, PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL & DEVELOPMENTAL HEALTH NEEDS, ASSESSED, TREATED/SUPPORTED & REVIEWED AT APPROPRIATE INTERVALS, INCLUDING AT their REQUEST.

COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH CHECKS AT APPROPRIATE INTERVALS WITH EARLY INTERVENTION

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES PROVIDED to ALL CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE UPON ENTERING CARE

SUPPORTED to HAVE FUN, PLAY, PARTICIPATE in SPORT, RECREATION & EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

GUIDED PATHWAYS to ACCESS SUPPORT SERVICES

RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIP INFORMATION, EDUCATION & SUPPORT

APPROPRIATE TREATMENTS PROVIDED AT NO COST

CARE is TRAUMA INFORMED

SEXUAL HEALTH & PUBERTY INFORMATION EDUCATION & SUPPORT

PERSONAL HYGIENE INFORMATION, EDUCATION & SUPPORT

SAFE & LOVED

BEING SAFE & LOVED MEANS THAT A CHILD or YOUNG PERSON LIVES in AN ENVIRONMENT that CULTIVATES A FEELING of 'HOME', WHERE they FEEL SECURE, KNOW they ARE HEARD & UNDERSTOOD, ARE SUPPORTED & ARE ABLE to LEARN & GROW.

A SAFE PLACE that FEELS LIKE 'HOME'

FEEL & BE LOVED BY PEOPLE they CAN TRUST

BASIC NEEDS ARE MET (SHELTER, FOOD & CLOTHING)

LISTENED to & TAKEN SERIOUSLY

SAFE to BE A CHILD, ALLOWED to MAKE MISTAKES & LEARN from THEM

SUPPORTED & PROVIDED WITH RULES, BOUNDARIES & MORALS to SUPPORT HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

SUPPORTED to STRIVE to REACH GOALS & FULL POTENTIAL

UNDERSTANDING of RACIAL IDENTITY & STIGMA

EQUITY & FAIRNESS

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ENTITLED to FAIR & EQUAL TREATMENT in the HOME, WITH the SAME RIGHTS, EXPECTATIONS & ENJOYMENT AS ALL (OTHER) CHILDREN WHILE SUPPORTED to PREPARE for LIFE AS AN INDEPENDENT INDIVIDUAL

TREATED the SAME WAY AS OTHER CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE in the HOUSEHOLD

HAVING REASONABLE PROCESS to SUPPORT PARTICIPATION in SCHOOL ACTIVITIES, CAMPS & OTHER EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

SUPPORT to ACCESS DRIVING LESSONS & OBTAIN A LICENCE

TIMELY & APPROPRIATE RESPONSES to REQUESTS for SUPPORT & TIMELY ACTIONING of THOSE REQUESTS

PROVIDED WITH the SAME RESOURCES & EQUIPMENT AS PEERS:

- PERSONAL HYGIENE ITEMS
- CLOTHING
- SCHOOL UNIFORM
- BOOKS
- SPORTING GEAR

NO LIMITS on ACCESS to TOOLS to SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE WHEN they LEAVE CARE

LIFE SKILLS INFORMATION, EDUCATION & SUPPORT

SYSTEMS & INDIVIDUALS WITHIN SYSTEMS ARE ACCOUNTABLE FOR UPHOLDING THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE, & ACTING WHEN THERE ARE ISSUES

ACCOUNTABILITY

THIS ISN'T LIMITED to CHILD SAFETY OFFICERS, AS IT INCLUDES MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS, COMMUNITY VISITORS, EDUCATORS, CARERS & SERVICE PROVIDERS.

To find out more, please contact
RVS@qfcc.qld.gov.au

You can find the full
Rights, Voices, Stories report on
our website at www.qfcc.qld.gov.au