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Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services
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Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Via email: waes.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) is pleased to provide a submission to the Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services. This submission does not directly address Workforce Australia Employment Services but raises matters relating to broader workforce reform which are relevant to optimising employment opportunities.

The QFCC is a statutory body of the Queensland Government. Its purpose is to influence change that improves the safety and wellbeing of Queensland's children and their families. The QFCC's work is underpinned by explicit commitments to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families and advancing the rights of children. The QFCC also hosts the independent Child Death Review Board (the Board), which was established to undertake systemic reviews of the child protection system following the deaths of children.

The QFCC acknowledges that unemployment is a significant driver of poverty in Australia. Nearly two thirds of single unemployed people and 55 per cent of single parents who are employed have incomes below the 'standard' poverty line.¹ Unemployment and lack of financial resources can have flow-on effects for children, young people and families, such as access to health or education services, and increased involvement with child protection and youth justice systems.

A report to the Board also noted an increased risk of suicide among those experiencing adverse childhood experiences, including poverty.² Importantly, the longer individuals are living in income poverty, the lower the probability they will escape these adverse circumstances.³ Improving employment outcomes should thus be a critical focus of all levels of government.

¹ Duncan A. (2022) *Behind the Line: Poverty and disadvantage in Australia 2022*, Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre Focus on the States Series.

² McDermott 2021 (Commissioned by the Child Death Review Board), *Highly vulnerable infants, children and young people: A joint child protection mental health response to prevent suicide*, <https://www.cdrb.qld.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CDRB-PREVENTING-SUICIDE-REPORT-by-Professor-Brett-McDermott-FINAL-1.pdf>.

³ McLachlan R, Gilfillan G, & Gordon J 2013, *Deep and persistent disadvantage in Australia*, <http://www.pc.gov.au/research/supporting/deep-persistent-disadvantage>



Employers' needs and support for local responses

The Board noted that government and non-government services across the human services sector are experiencing high and persistent workloads, in part stemming from high demand and staff vacancies caused by:

- competition for staff due to disparities in remuneration and incentives across services; and
- challenges in attracting and retaining a workforce (particularly attracting community members to roles in First Nations communities).

This, in turn, impacts the timeliness of service delivery to clients—children, young people, families and communities. In its 2021-22 Annual Report, the Board made two recommendations in relation to workforce reform, with the intent to:

- address shortages of staff and skills across the human services sector through a coordinated, whole-of-sector approach; and
- reform the community-controlled sector to support service delivery, particularly in remote areas. This includes transferring authority and investment to communities to support locally-led service design, provision and recruitment.

A copy of the Board's findings and recommendations can be found on its website at www.cdrb.qld.gov.au.

The QFCC considers that strengthening and investing in the community-controlled sector, particularly in regional and remote areas, would help to provide a channel for employment and economic growth in communities that best reflect the needs of those communities.

Further, it supports coordination across Commonwealth and State governments, and with local communities, to address barriers to employment and improve the ability of human services to attract and retain a skilled workforce by working with employment services.

Supporting job seekers to secure employment

All people deserve the best possible service in helping to find employment and the QFCC advocates for all people having the right to work and to protection against unemployment.

In 2018, the QFCC released *This place I call home, The views of children and young people on growing up in Queensland* which shared the views of more than 7,000 children and young people in Queensland. Children and young people indicated it was important to them to have gainful and fulfilling employment in their profession of choice, and that they were able to gain work experience to develop and demonstrate the skills valued by employers. Those living in rural and remote communities spoke about the problems they experience when they want to access local employment opportunities. In these areas, part-time or casual positions outside of school hours are limited, and limited public transport created challenges for engaging with employment opportunities. During consultations, children and young people presented their views and suggestions for employment opportunities. These are available on the QFCC's website at:



<https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-09/QFCC%20GuiQ%202018%20Growing%20up%20in%20QLD%20This%20Place%20I%20call%20Home.pdf>

While the QFCC is supportive of employment assistance programs for young people (such as Transition to Work), these programs could include a focus on the unique needs experienced by particular groups of young people seeking employment, including those transitioning from out-of-home care, not attending school settings or who have a youth justice background.

The Committee may be interested in Queensland's Transition 2 Success (T2S) program, which supports young people over the age of 15 in the youth justice system (or considered at risk of entering it). T2S helps young people lower their risk of offending by engaging with education, training and employment. A 2018 evaluation of the program demonstrated a reduction in reoffending following program completion and positive engagement with education, employment and training. A cost benefit analysis of T2S showed that every \$1 spent on the program resulted in \$2.13 of benefits.⁴

Reforms to help jobseekers secure employment should also consider the significant contribution of volunteers to the workforce and the skills and capabilities that volunteering can provide to obtain employment.

In 2019, the QFCC released an issues paper on the legal and policy concerns relating to youth volunteering and consultation feedback from volunteer-involving organisations and youth volunteers. It looked at youth volunteering across three main issues:

- employment and economic outcomes;
- individual and community wellbeing; and
- barriers and opportunities.

The paper stemmed from consultation with more than 7,000 children and young people about the most important issues to them, with many raising the value of volunteering to improve future employability and current barriers.

The paper is available on the QFCC's website at:

<https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/youth/information-and-resources/support-young-people-volunteer>

⁴ Deloitte Access Economics 2018 (Commissioned by the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women), *Transition to Success: Evaluation Report*, <https://www.cyma.qld.gov.au/resources/dcsyw/about-us/performance-evaluation/program-eval/t2s-evaluation-report.pdf>



Research, evaluation and adaption

Evaluation plays an essential role in the implementation, development and assessment of government and non-government programs. The QFCC encourages Workforce Australia Employment Services to consider that any measures used to monitor the effectiveness of employment services should move away from a compliance agenda and focus on longer-term outcomes for jobseekers and employers.

If you or your officers have any queries in relation to this matter, please contact strategic.policy@qfcc.qld.gov.au

Yours sincerely



Luke Twyford
Principal Commissioner
Queensland Family and Child Commission

22 March 2023

