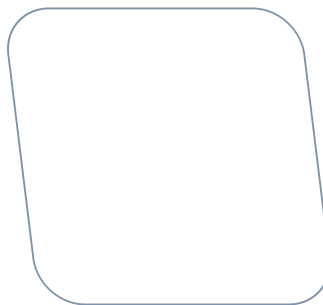
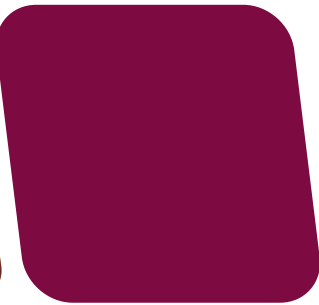


# building blocks

SEPTEMBER 2004 MAGAZINE



## Child Protection Week 2004



### QUEENSLAND'S QUIET ACHIEVERS AWARDED

**Queensland's most outstanding child protection achievers were recognised for their efforts in protecting the state's children from abuse and neglect at the official kick off to Child Protection Week 2004.**

Winners of the annual Child Protection Week Awards were announced in a special ceremony to mark the start of Child Protection Week at Brisbane's historic Customs House on Sunday 5 September.

Child protection professionals, volunteers, public servants, service providers, educators and researchers from throughout Queensland were awarded for their innovative work.

Queensland's new Minister for Child Safety Mike Reynolds, who attended the awards for the first time, said he was humbled to see how ordinary Queenslanders were making extraordinary contributions to the lives of disadvantaged children.

"I offer my heartfelt thanks to those in our community who devote so much of their lives to what is often a traumatic and challenging field of community service.

"Protecting children from harm is the most important role anyone can play in a child's life and that is what this year's theme is all about," Mr Reynolds said.

Department of Child Safety Director-General Robin Sullivan said the awards were an important part of Child Protection Week and recognised the innovative work of individuals and organisations in strengthening the state's child protection services.

"Volunteers, foster carers and professionals who are leading local child protection initiatives are at the very core of our child protection system," Dr Sullivan said.

"Often, the most productive and innovative contributors in communities are also the most quiet of achievers.

"These awards aim to bring these special people into the spotlight as shining examples of community spirit and the positive impact that comes from individuals and communities striving to make a difference."

continued on page 7 >>



**Queensland  
Government**  
Department of  
Child Safety

# building blocks – helping build the future

From the window of my office in George Street, Brisbane, I can see construction workers swarming over a soon to be completed high-rise. Over the past few months I have seen the foundations dug and supported, the steel frames erected, the concrete poured and the glass fitted.

The process is very much like the building work we are currently undertaking as we create a new Department of Child Safety in Queensland.

The multi-storey construction site did not influence the decision to name this new publication *Building Blocks*, but it is an apt analogy.

Together, we have secured the foundations of this new Department and we are now building the walls. They are strong walls, buttressed by legislation, policies and procedures that will create a structure that has as its core, the safety and wellbeing of at risk children and young people.

We are ensuring the long time integrity of the building with a recruitment policy designed to attract and retain committed, professional officers.

We have strong government support, with guaranteed funding increases and a commitment from the 10 government departments most involved in child safety issues to appoint Child Safety Directors and report at regular intervals on their child safety activities.

Importantly, we are further strengthening the structure by involving our service delivery partners. This is an integral feature of the new child safety structure in Queensland.

Our service delivery partners – the funded services from Cape York to Coolangatta, which work with us to protect at risk children and young people – are essential to the success of our mission.

The Department of Child Safety cannot operate in isolation. The immense undertaking to protect Queensland's vulnerable children and young people requires a committed team effort.

In turn, that means special attention to communications. We have to exchange information with a wide range of people over vast distances.

As the agency's first Director-General, I am particularly keen to build effective working relationships with our service delivery partners over the coming months, and a number of measures are being developed to achieve this objective.

One is this magazine, *Building Blocks*, which will appear each month from September and be distributed to all Child Safety Service Centres, our funded organisations, foster, relative and respite carers, Members of Parliament, local councils, libraries, medical centres and other community and government outlets.

*Building Blocks* will be part of the process of establishing strong and enduring partnerships with key stakeholders, funded organisations, and child protection sector peak bodies, advocacy groups and individuals.

*Building Blocks* will have a strong focus on reporting the programs and work being carried out by groups involved in child safety.

It will also report on the progress of the implementation of the child protection reform agenda and the department's *Future Directions* initiatives.

Its pages will also be open to our service partners, with all organisations invited to submit items and articles detailing their activities, initiatives and successes.

Like you, I am excited to be working to create a cohesive, world-class child protection sector in Queensland.

On the rare occasions when I look out of my window, I sometimes wonder if the workers 100 metres away realise that we are all in the construction industry.

They are building units. We are building a future.

**Robin Sullivan**

DIRECTOR-GENERAL, DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SAFETY

## building blocks

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ROBIN SULLIVAN GETS BEHIND THE SAUSAGE SIZZLE AT THE EKKA FAMILY DAY, PROUDLY SPONSORED BY THE ROYAL NATIONAL ASSOCIATION - A FOSTER CARER CARD BUSINESS SUPPORTER - AND THE QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT.

# Caring for the future

**It is no surprise that caring is second nature to Bryan Smith. After nurturing more than 100 Queensland children in need of protection, Bryan can almost perform his foster carer role with his eyes closed.**

However, for the dozens of children who have known Bryan as foster parent over the past 12 years, he is as attentive and responsive to their needs as he was on the day he first began this challenging but rewarding job.

In fact, Bryan's dedication to the safety of children and commitment to the carers who protect them have seen him take on two roles that require his eyes to be wide open.

Bryan's appointment last year to the position of President of Foster Care Queensland (FCQ), and his recent appointment as the organisation's advocacy officer, mean that foster carers across the state now have a strong, clear voice, and one that understands their needs from an active foster carer's perspective.

As industry champion in Queensland's foster care system, Bryan knows that he and his wife, who currently have eight children living at home, three of whom are in care, won't have a lot of spare time.

Not one to waste time, Bryan said his goals for Foster Care Queensland in 2004 were already being realised.

"My goals for the Association and for foster carers this year has been to strengthen our foster care advocacy and support team network through increased funding," Bryan said.

"Unless we are able to support the carers that are already in the system, we won't be able to reduce the attrition rate."

Bryan is also optimistic about building a productive partnership with the new Department of Child Safety.

He said the agency had already approved new funding for the network, which was a major triumph for FCQ.

"It is also my hope that out of the structural changes to the Department of Child Safety and Foster Care Queensland, in partnership with other agencies, can provide the best possible service to children in care.

"Our bottom line will always be the children in care," he said.

Bryan said he felt the new department was on track for the future, and he was positive about changes that had already been implemented.

Byran's appointments are the culmination of a decade spent training, supporting and advocating for foster carers.

Bryan was appointed as an advocate for his regional foster care committee on the Gold Coast shortly after becoming a foster carer in 1992.

By 1993, he had joined the then Foster Parents Association Queensland (FPAQ) committee and was elected State Representative of the Foster Care Committee.

It was a busy 12 months for Bryan, who accepted a trainer position at Muyim, a fostering program for young people aged 12 to 17 years.

Bryan spent several years at Muyim and was appointed to full time coordinator in 1997, the same year he was elected to secretary of FPAQ.

Between 2000 and 2001, Bryan worked part-time for the former Department of Families on new policies for the State Foster Care Committee and Regional Foster Care Committee, and was elected President of Foster Care Queensland in 2003.

With so many achievements in the past, Bryan is not tempted to rest on his laurels. His recent appointment to the paid position of advocacy officer for FCQ means that he can focus on the needs of the sector full-time, without having to fit around the demands of other work.

"The position, which will be supported by an administration officer, executive officer and a Foster Care Advocacy and Support Team coordinator, will allow FCQ to focus on the needs of our clients with greater tenacity.

"This is something I didn't think I'd ever see in my time," he said.

Bryan said the advocacy officer position would keep a foster carer focus within the organisation, with previous or current foster care experience a compulsory prerequisite.

FCQ currently has over 900 members throughout Queensland, and continues to actively recruit for more.

For more information about FCQ advocacy and support services, contact 3857 3753.

"My goals for the Association and for foster carers this year has been to strengthen the foster care advocacy and support team network..."



BRYAN SMITH

## Adoptions registers open for first time in two years

**The department's local and inter-country adoptions units have been busy handling an influx of expressions of interest from hundreds of Queenslanders wanting to adopt a child from within the state or overseas.**

The applications began flooding in on 12 September when the Queensland General Children's Adoption Register and the Intercountry Adoption Register opened for eight weeks after a two-year freeze.

The rush of submissions was anticipated, with additional staff allocated to cope with the numbers of potential adoptive parents applying to place their names on the registers.

The registers closed in 2002 following changes to the 1964 legislation, developed in a vastly different adoption climate.

Then, 1418 Queensland children were adopted and there was no appreciable waiting list. In 2002, when the amendments were approved, 49 children were adopted in the general, relative, overseas and special needs categories, while 987 families were on the lists.

The amendments, which removed regard to chronological order when placing children, impacted on people already on the lists. After widespread discussions, it was decided to freeze the registers until the number of people on them was more manageable.

The number of couples whose names were on the Expression of Interest Register had fallen to 160 in July, with 126 couples on the General Children's Adoption Program. The Minister for Child Safety, Mike Reynolds, officially reopened the registers on Sunday 12 September during a barbecue lunch at Brisbane's Roma Street Parkland for families and groups interested in adoptions.

In opening the registers, Mr Reynolds said he was delighted to be able to provide Queensland families with an opportunity to express interest in being assessed as prospective adoptive parents for a child from another country or from within the state who was in need of a loving home.

"We do need some expressions of interest to ensure we are able to match children requiring families with the best possible adoptive parents," he said.

"However, as a result of changing societal values and the supports now available to parents, there are less and less Queensland children needing adoptive homes, and to a growing extent, fewer overseas children whose needs cannot be met in their countries of origin.

"Overseas nations determine the number of children they require placements for and some are making inroads into responding to the needs of the children in their country requiring adoption.

"At the same time, the number of people seeking to adopt children from overseas continues to increase every year and there are already almost 840 couples on the department's mailing list waiting to be advised of the next expression of interest round.

Mr Reynolds said the department was geared up to receive the many hundreds of expressions that were likely to be lodged, and would have the capacity to meet the needs of children requiring adoptive placements.

The department is currently running information sessions to assist interested families in making a decision about whether or not adoption is right for them, to explain how to make an expression of interest and what the process for assessing adoption applications is.

Information sessions were held in Townsville and Brisbane, and will also run in Rockhampton.

## Carers to benefit from business discounts

**Queensland's Foster Carer Card continues to reward the outstanding efforts of our foster carers, with nearly 4000 new edition cards issued to relative and general carers last month.**

Foster Carer Card coordinator, Lindsay Boreham, said that since the scheme began in 2002, more than 211 businesses had joined the program throughout the state.

"There are now close to 400 individual outlets across Queensland that support Foster Carer Card and numbers continue to grow," Lindsay said.

"Carers often go without life's little luxuries, and this card helps to ease the financial costs of caring by rewarding carers through business discounts."

The card also gives carers access to the Australian Discount Shopping Service, allowing them to gain further discounts on consumer items such as cars, electrical goods and travel.

Lindsay welcomed carers and staff to recommend more businesses to join.

"If there is a company that's not in the business directory, and you think they could provide discounted services, I encourage you to direct them to me or to the online business proposal application form," he said.

Lindsay said the initiative was just one way in which the Government and private sector were working together to recognise the valuable contribution of foster carers to their communities.

"I take my hat off to our foster carers. It takes a very special person with a very big heart to welcome abused or neglected children into their home and give them a safe and loving place to live," Lindsay said.

"I think many businesses admire and respect the wonderful job carers do and are keen to thank them whenever they can," he said.

To find out more about the scheme or to recommend a new business, contact Lindsay on 3224 7565.



KEITH AND PAULINE BAZLEY OF THE AUSTRALIAN'S ADOPTING FROM CHINA SUPPORT GROUP WITH JORDAN, AGED 2, CELEBRATE THE ANNOUNCEMENT WITH DIRECTOR-GENERAL ROBIN SULLIVAN AND MINISTER FOR CHILD SAFETY MIKE REYNOLDS.

# Public consultation leads to removal of adoption age ceiling

**Age is no longer an insurmountable barrier for people seeking to be considered as suitable prospective adoptive parents in Queensland.**

The removal of upper age limits from Queensland's adoption requirements resulted from the statewide public consultation process that took place as part of the ongoing Adoption Legislation Review.

Former review team manager Julieann Cork said people at the public meetings were asked a series of questions, including one dealing with the imposition of an age limit on people hoping to become adoptive parents.

"There was a widespread feeling that age was not relevant to a person's capacity to provide high quality care for children requiring an adoptive placements and that the age limit was unnecessary.

"The resulting research led us to conclude that age in itself should not be a factor in determining someone's eligibility to be assessed as a prospective adoptive parent," said Julieann.

As a result, in August, the Governor in Council agreed to the removal of the upper age limits from the eligibility criteria that apply to prospective adoptive parents in Queensland.

The age limits were intended to ensure that adopted children were not at increased risk of prematurely losing a parent, and to ensure they were placed with adoptive parents able to provide secure and long-term care.

Julieann said this notion had since been refuted by a lack of evidence linking successful adoption outcomes solely to adoptive parents' age.

"The Queensland government now agrees that age alone should not preclude people from being able to express interest in being assessed as prospective adoptive parents," she said.

Before the changes were made, people seeking to adopt a child under the General Children's Program needed to be under 36 years at the time they expressed interest in being assessed as a prospective adoptive parent, or under 40 years if they had a child in their care at the time of their expression of interest.

The removal of upper age limits for prospective adoptive parents in Queensland will not necessarily enable greater access for couples to be considered as adoptive parents for a child from overseas.

Each country has determined eligibility criteria they believe ensures the best possible placements for children they cannot place with families within their own country.

In announcing the move, the Minister for Child Safety, Mike Reynolds, said the *Adoption of Children Act 1964* had been amended in the past to respond to changing times and adoption practices, but had not been subject to a comprehensive review.

Mr Reynolds said the Terms of Reference for the current Adoption Legislation Review would ensure that a draft Bill is developed which will provide a framework for contemporary, child focussed adoption legislation in Queensland and be comparable to adoption legislation in other states and territories.

"We want efficient, accountable and child focussed adoption services that promote the welfare and best interests of the adopted persons throughout their lives," Mr Reynolds said.

# Helping children talk about trauma

**Interviewing children and young people who have been the victim of significant harm or sexual abuse can be a traumatic experience. Police and child protection workers must balance the need to gather evidence for judicial proceedings with ensuring the child or young person is not further traumatised by the interview.**

The Department of Child Safety in partnership with Queensland Police Service has redeveloped the Interviewing Children and Recording Evidence (ICARE) training package to help officers from both agencies achieve this balance.

Recommendation 5 of Project Axis - the joint Queensland Crime Commission and Queensland Police Service Inquiry into child sex offending in Queensland in November 2000 - prompted the overhaul of the training package to ensure more officers were appropriately trained to conduct interviews with child victims.

More than 110 Child Safety Officers and 110 police officers have been trained in the ICARE program since July 2003.

The training package, which was a finalist in the Queensland Training Awards, uses the free narrative interview approach, allowing children and young people to tell their side of the story using their own words without interruption.

Janeen Danslow, a child safety officer from the Fortitude Valley Area Office, contributed to the new package and has delivered training to other staff, and used the techniques herself to interview children and young people.

"The goal of ICARE interview techniques is to decrease the likelihood of having to re-interview children and cause them further trauma," Janeen said.

"Young children especially, don't remember events in chronological order, but ICARE allows us to get a clear picture of what has happened without us imposing what we believe might have occurred.

"The new ICARE course is more inclusive, and puts the needs of our major client groups first - it has compulsory units on interviewing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disabilities and children from non-English speaking backgrounds."

The enhanced ICARE training package is the only course of its kind in Australia that is registered by the Training and Employment Recognition Council of Queensland and has been developed to reflect accepted best practice in forensic interviewing.

"The ICARE interview method provides us with the information we need for our legal responsibilities from a departmental perspective, as well as the criminal law responsibilities of police.

"The course is received very well by our child safety officers and police officers - it really makes participants shift the focus of their thinking on interviewing children back to what is best for the child."

The ICARE program was presented at the International Congress on Child Abuse and Neglect hosted by the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) in Brisbane in September.

Child Safety Director-General Robin Sullivan commended Child Safety and QPS staff on being one of three finalists for the Queensland Public Sector Best Learning and Development Initiative Award and their presentation at ISPCAN.

# Training program teaches staff support skills

**Department of Child Safety officers will soon be able to offer confidential help and guidance within the workplace to assist their colleagues during a personal or professional crisis.**

Director-General Robin Sullivan launched the first Peer Support Program for child protection workers on 30 August 2004 at the Bardon Conference Centre, as recommended under the Blueprint.

Twenty staff attended the five-day program and a further 60 staff are due to undertake the training this year, with courses starting in September and November.

Paul Scully, who created the successful Queensland Ambulance Service staff support program Priority One, has been seconded for six months to develop and implement the department's new integrated Employee Support Program.

"Peer support is recognised as a positive and practical approach to building a more resilient workforce within human service organisations, particularly those dealing with traumatic events on a regular basis," Paul said.

"This program is one element of a larger staff support program, which includes post incident debriefing, Employee Assistance Scheme counselling, education, recruit training and research.

"Peer support programs provide a way to confidentially talk out any problems with specially trained co-workers.

"Importantly, they provide assistance to staff at all levels of the organisation, because peer support officers volunteer from all areas and levels of the department," he said.

Under the Peer Support Program, staff have been trained to provide psychological and emotional support for their work colleagues as part of a new Employee Support Program that recognises the stressful nature of child protection work.

The Blueprint proposed a framework for the introduction of an integrated Employee Support Program.

It also recommended support for frontline employees and the introduction of a program that includes debriefing, vicarious trauma and resilience training, peer support and maximising external employee support assistance.

"Child protection work is inherently stressful and confronting for employees," Paul said.

"This training provides staff with the skills and training to be the first line of contact or support in the work environment."

Topics of the course include post traumatic stress, loss and grief, Indigenous issues and understanding the unique nature of child protection and support work.

An extra day workshop will be held for Indigenous Peer Support Officers as part of the department's commitment to Indigenous Employee Support Services.

"Peer supporters can be proactive in the workplace and approach staff in a reassuring manner diffusing the situation and minimising the likelihood of it becoming a problem down the track," Paul said.

"There is also a strong commitment to educating staff about self care at induction programs and workshops."

For more information about the program, contact Paul Scully on 3380 6285.



LAUNCHING INTO PEER SUPPORT ARE (FROM LEFT) ROBIN SULLIVAN, DIRECTOR-GENERAL; PAMELA MAZZA (BUNDABERG AREA OFFICE); NEVILLE ECKERSLEY (IPSWICH AND LOGAN REGIONAL OFFICE) AND PAUL SCULLY.

## Remembering the past... looking to the future...

**While the Government's new lead child protection agency focuses on creating a brighter future, the tragedy and pain of the past was not forgotten by Minister for Child Safety Mike Reynolds during Child Protection Week this year.**

Minister Reynolds paid tribute to all Queenslanders who experienced abuse in state or church run institutions on Recognition and Remembrance Day, Wednesday 8 September.

Addressing guests at the annual Child Protection Week Recognition and Remembrance Day Ceremony, Mr Reynolds commended those who gave accounts of their abuse at the 1998 Forde Inquiry.

"By speaking out, as so many of you bravely did at the Forde Inquiry, it was possible to end decades of silence and lift the veil of fear and secrecy under which many Queensland children were forced to live.

"It is a tribute to you all, that you have been able to not only endure and survive such experiences, but to rise above them," he said.

Mr Reynolds pledged his commitment to safeguarding children from similar abuse in the future.

He said he was pleased with an initiative involving members of the Historical Abuse Network and staff of the Esther Centre in delivering presentations about the learnings of the Forde Inquiry at sessions for the Department's Child Safety Officer training program.

"This involvement at an early stage of officers' engagement with the new Department of Child Safety will help to build the new culture and ethos we are striving to develop," Mr Reynolds said.

"It is important that the experiences of people, who themselves were in the care of the state, continue to inform the development of child protection practices in Queensland," he said.

Representatives from the department's Child Protection Branch attended the event, which is dedicated to recognising and remembering all those who experienced abuse while placed as children in institutions, detention centres and foster care and to acknowledge the impact of those experiences on peoples' lives.

## Child Protection Week 2004

### OUR CHILD PROTECTION HEROES

#### This year awards were presented to:

- **Professional category** - Rhonda Cole, senior child protection worker at Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Services
- **Volunteer category** - Dr Richard Roylance of Protect All Children Today
- **Public Sector category** - Peter Crawford, Detective Acting Inspector at the Sexual Crimes Investigation Unit, Queensland Police Service
- **Regional Program category** - Sunshine Cooloola Services Against Sexual Violence Inc
- **Youth Participation category** - Education Queensland Behaviour Support Services based in the Cairns Cape and Gulf Education District
- **Education Initiative category** - Carole Park State School
- **Research Initiative category** - Foster Carer Audit Team, who worked on the "Final Report on Phrase One of the Audit of Foster Carers Subject to Child Protection Notifications."

### Child Safety staff join Child Protection Week celebrations

**Department of Child Safety staff were keen to show their commitment to protecting Queensland's most vulnerable children by marking Child Protection Week with celebrations and commemorative activities throughout the state.**

The week is an opportunity for staff to reflect on the valuable, challenging work they do and to celebrate their own personal commitment to making a difference to the lives of children at risk of abuse or neglect.

The week also plays an important role in raising awareness of child safety issues in the community and reinforcing partnerships with government partners and other agencies.

#### BRISBANE

More than 100 staff converged on George Street in Brisbane to attend a special presentation by the Queensland Police Service's new Child Safety Director, Detective Superintendent Ross Barnett.

Representatives from each of the 10 government departments involved in child protection attended the morning tea on 8 September, reinforcing this year's theme – "Child Protection is Everybody's Business".

Detective Superintendent Barnett, who monitors and coordinates child protection services in QPS, said he was working to help create a cross-agency network responsible for managing and implementing child safety services in Queensland.

Detective Superintendent Barnett is manager of the Sexual Crimes Investigation Unit and also coordinates the Juvenile Aid Bureau, whose specially trained officers work so closely with Child Safety Officers.

Director-General Robin Sullivan said she hoped the event would be the first of many celebrations as part of the State Government's multi-agency approach to child protection.

### COVER STORY CONTINUED.....



"Today is a time where we, as partners in child protection service delivery, cement our new alliance and reinforce our shared vision for Queensland children.

"It is also a time to present a unified, cooperative and coordinated message to the community – children are our first priority," she said.

### REGIONAL EVENTS

Child Safety regional staff made Child Protection Week 2004 a memorable time for communities across the state, hosting a range of events from family fun days to information displays in local shopping centres.

**Mt Isa** celebrated the week with a family sausage sizzle on Saturday 11 September, which, in addition to the delicious outdoor barbecue, provided entertainment for children of all ages in the form of face painting, colouring-in and a touch football game.

In the lead up to Child Protection week, staff from **Innisfail** held a family fun day on Saturday 28 August, which featured the region's official launch of the week by the Honourable Bob Katter, Federal Member for Kennedy and Danette Walsh, a local Indigenous elder.

Activities included face painting, story telling, morning tea, talent competition, live music, a sausage sizzle, an Indigenous dance troop, a gymnastic display and information booths.

**Cairns** staff also celebrated with a family fun day on Tuesday 7 September. The event featured information booths, craft activities, a jumping castle, merry-go-round, free showbags and food and drinks.

The local launch of Child Protection Week in **Mackay** was held on Monday 6 September. Staff attended an opening ceremony, which featured guest speakers from the community. This was followed on Saturday 11 September by a family fun day in Jubilee Park which included face painting, Indigenous story telling and dancing, sample bags, rock and roll dancing presentation, folk group singers, sausage sizzle, sensory circus and information displays.

**Redlands** staff set up an information display in Capalaba Park Shopping Centre on Thursday 9 September, which brought together local community organisations that provide services to families to talk to the public and provide information about local child protection and family services.

Staff in Kingaroy hosted an information display at **Kingaroy Shopping World** from Monday 6 to Saturday 11 September to inform the community about child protection and how to become a foster carer.

**Logan** staff organised children's activities at the Logan Civic Centre park on Wednesday 8 September to provide some water play and storytelling activities, fruit and drinks for morning tea and balloons for the children to take home.

**Ipswich** staff hosted a 'picnic in the park' on Friday 10 September for the community's foster care families. The event included face painting, balloons, badge making, a jumping castle, egg and spoon races and cricket.

# Regions ramp up respite and alternative care services

## FEATURE STORY

**Four innovative alternative and respite care services received exciting news in August after the department announced they would be sharing in more than \$4.9 million in funding.**

The multi-million dollar boost will see organisations in Mackay, Cairns, Lutwyche and Wynnum provide much-needed support, respite and alternative care services to young people in their communities.

The funding is another accomplishment for Queensland's community-based child protection agencies, but the real winners will be young Queenslanders.

The multi-million, three year funding allocation to the organisations is part of the State Government's *Queensland Families: Future Directions* initiative.

The initiative was launched in June 2002 as part of a \$188 million, four-year budget increase for the then Department of Families and is an integral part of the new Department of Child Safety's commitment to developing strong and effective partnerships with community organisations.

Each community service was evaluated during a 12-month trial period and will now progress to pilot phase. During this phase, services will continue to participate in rigorous evaluation processes to further develop and refine their models of service delivery so they can better understand how to achieve positive client outcomes.

## Wynnum and Redlands partnership takes a team approach to helping troubled young people

**A community partnership providing much needed services to young residents in the Wynnum and Redlands area, was given the green light to continue with the help of more than \$2.5 million in funding.**

The Wynnum Redlands Integrated Care and Support Initiative (WRICSI), auspiced by Save the Children Fund, will give greater access to out-of-home care and support services to young people aged 12 to 17 years with intensive support needs, and their families.

The department will inject over \$840,000 a year

over the next three years into the partnership to continue developing its services.

This money will provide the community with intensive family-based care for four young people and a residential care service for eight young people.

It will also provide a therapeutic support and intervention service for 20 young people and an accommodation service for five to six young people for whom family-based care is inappropriate.

Programs manager Lisa Hillan said the initiative's great strength came from its team approach to developing services and outcomes for children and young people who often had complex needs.

Organisations involved in the Wynnum and Redlands partnership agreement included Anglicare TRACC South, Silky Oaks Children's Haven, Save the Children and the Department.

"The local area agencies in Wynnum and Redlands have dedicated staff to the project and have significant staff involvement," Lisa said.

"In addition, both Wynnum and Redlands Child Safety area managers, team leaders and alternative care workers are involved, and we could not work in an integrated way without them."

Members of the partnership share responsibility for children and young people in care. This cuts down the sense of working in isolation, and pooling resources allows the partners to better work out comprehensive, creative and effective strategies for children and young people.

"We don't have any miracle answers to problems with complex children and young people, but working in partnership allows us to find a way to keep going and keep rethinking the work when it's tough," Lisa said.

Lisa said the partnership approach meant the resources of the combined groups could be used to find solutions.

"Working together is a richer experience in terms of what is learned and there are other benefits for individual children and young people.

"Sometimes, the way we worked fragments the young person's history, but by operating as a team you gain a community understand and knowledge and we are better able to plan and provide for the young person's needs.

"What holds us together is wanting to get better outcomes for children and young people," Lisa said.

## A million good reasons...

**The next three years will be a challenging and rewarding time for Brisbane-based Life Without Barriers.**

Over that period, the organisation will receive more than one million dollars to pilot a short-term respite service for children and young people aged between eight and 15 years.

The program is designed to test the question: *What is effective respite care, for whom, in what circumstances and why?* The answers will help the program to produce stability in children and young people's relationships and care arrangements within their local care communities.

The program is based on the understanding that respite needs to be viewed in a wider sense than overnight stays and that any activities need to be seen positively by young people and their carers.

Such positive views are seen as essential for the best outcomes for the children and young people.

Program coordinator Sharon Atkin said she was really pleased about the outcomes experienced.

"This is about supporting the carers, but at the same time, it is really important to be focussed on the needs of the child or young person," Sharon said.

"We have found that in doing this, the flow on from this approach has meant better, more effective support for the carers.

"Also, we were not sure, but we hoped that what we were doing would lead to reconnection, linking children and young people with their families, and that has indeed turned out to be one of the very welcome components.

"We have taken children and parents away together when there has not been contact for a period of time, sometimes years," she said.

Program staff indicate that the past 18 months have been challenging and rewarding, and say that the children and young people have taught them a lot about what they see as helpful ways of enhancing their life experiences.

“Program workers have reported that the young people are usually great at identifying significant people in their lives that they would like to spend time with and have come up with many and varied community activities that they would like to participate in.

“Staff are also pleased that much of the respite that they supported had occurred with natural family members of the young people,” Sharon said.

As a result of the issues that can arise for children and young people who live in out of home care, the program aims to ensure that the program’s supports allow for:

- respite that is viewed positively by the young person with someone who is significant to them
- young people actively participating in decision-making and exploring options to gain a sense of control in their lives
- normalising issues such as increased non-compliance that is associated with adolescence
- increasing resilience for young people through protective factors, such as increased significant relationships and being involved in their broader communities

## In Cairns, sometimes it’s the little things that make a difference

**In far north Queensland, Cairns-based Lifeline Community Care will get more than \$750,000 over the next three years to continue providing a respite and support service in the region.**

The key is a tiered range of respite type services based around carer needs.

“It’s creative respite in that it is not just having a respite carer taking a child from another carer for the weekend,” Manager of Out of Home Care Services for Lifeline Community Care, Graham Day said.

“At one level, we look at a range of practical tasks that taken separately might appear insignificant, but might be just what a carer needs.

“It might be doing the shopping for a carer during a particularly busy time, or providing homework and tutorial expertise in another area.

“It’s about an informal network of carers who can provide their particular strengths and expertise to other carers as and when the skills are required,” Graham said.

Program manager Liz Cooney said the process involved assessing the support needs for foster carers and responding at one of a number of different levels as required.

“Respite is having a break. It is not necessarily a whole day. We have carers who are studying, so it might be taking a child for a short, but specific and regular period of time.

“Some of our carers are quite isolated, and this system might provide transportation to appointments.

“Higher levels involve family support programs with practical and therapeutic support programs,” Liz said.

The success of the program lies in its ability to tailor the support services to the needs of the carers and the children and young people in their care.

“We have peer support measures involving weekly group meetings for children in care so that they can share experiences and learning.

“There are other measures including mentoring, tutoring and jobs and skills development, and we have programs for members of a carer’s family,” she said.

During the 12-month trial, 51 clients were referred to the service by the department, of whom 25 received respite services.

## A family and friends alternative for children in Mackay and the Whitsundays

**The prospects for children in need of alternative care in the Mackay and Whitsunday area became brighter in August with a three-year, \$500,000 funding allocation to Churches of Christ.**

The money will be used to provide crucial alternative care and respite services to children and young people on child protection orders.

Service manager for Pathways Mackay and Whitsunday, Sarah Crouch, said the project focuses on family and community members known to the child to provide respite.

“We look for people the child or young person already has a relationship with and enlist their support.

“We talk with departmental case workers, foster carers, parents and when appropriate, the child or young person, to see if they know people who might be able to provide the respite options,” Sarah said.

The initiative began in January 2003 and to date about 60 children and young people have been involved.

“Respite historically has an ‘emergent’ quality, but we wanted to provide respite on a more planned, more regular basis with someone the child knows.

“In a way, it is based on the type of respite found in a family, where aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents assist with the care of children when, for example a sleepover is arranged on a weekend,” Sarah said.

“It’s working well and there are a number of bonus outcomes that were not originally identified.

“The process has really been inclusive of the natural families and the children, young people and their families can all be involved.”

The service also offers support to children to help them lead safe happy lives, including access to short-term counselling, assistance with accommodation and access to other community services.

**“This is about supporting the carers, but at the same time, it is really important to be focussed on the needs of the child or young person.”**

# ISPCAN showcases Qld innovation

MICHELLE MOSS, CHILD SAFETY OFFICER FROM THE MACKAY AREA OFFICE, SAID THAT DEVELOPING A SENSE OF IDENTITY WAS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENTS IN ACHIEVING GOOD OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE.



## FEATURE STORY

**New theories of child protection and innovative practices pioneered in Queensland were showcased to the world at an international congress on child abuse and neglect held in Brisbane this week.**

The congress, hosted by the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN), provided an opportunity for Department of Child Safety staff to demonstrate their specialist knowledge and skills, presenting papers, workshops and visual displays throughout the three-day program.

Minister for Child Safety Mike Reynolds addressed delegates at the opening of the Congress, sharing the Department's partnership model for child protection services in Queensland with the international delegates.

"It's been a great opportunity for the Department and our community partners throughout Queensland to demonstrate some of the innovative service delivery methods we operate and the level of knowledge and expertise that resides in our own child protection staff with our peers from around the world," Mr Reynolds said.

Highlights from the congress program presented by staff from the Departments of Child Safety and Communities included coping with trauma and building emotional resilience in frontline workers, quality assurance and accountability, performance measurement and the identity of children in foster care.

DAVID NEWTON, A LEARNING FACILITATOR FROM BRISBANE CITY REGION, PRESENTED INFORMATION ON A TRIAL TO DEVELOP A NEW, STATEWIDE QA PROGRAM FOR CHILD PROTECTION OFFICES.



## Quality Assurance and Child Protection

**The Quality Assurance Branch of the Department of Child Safety presented preliminary findings from their action-research trial to develop a new, statewide QA program for child protection offices.**

Karyn Smith, Director of the QA Branch, and David Newton, a Learning Facilitator from Brisbane City region, presented the three models being trialed in nine child safety offices across Queensland.

The research project is focussed on providing child protection offices with clear recommendations to improve their quality of practice and to also identify systemic issues impacting on service delivery.

The pair will explore the early findings, which have shown that QA processes can successfully identify key practice and systemic issues that influence quality outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

Data from the trials, as well as additional research being conducted by the University of Queensland, will lead to the development of a singular quality assurance process to be piloted across Child Safety Service Centres.

## Vicarious trauma and emotional resilience among front-line child protection workers

**The nature and extent of vicarious trauma among frontline child protection staff was revealed at this year's ISPCAN conference.**

Based on research with workers in Logan and Ipswich conducted earlier this year, Jude Harrison, Learning Facilitator, Anita Thomas, Child Safety Officer, and Neville Eckersley, Senior Project Officer, presented the findings, which also propose strategies and resources to address vicarious trauma at the personal, workgroup and organisational levels.

The study also investigated the unique nature of vicarious trauma for Indigenous child protection staff, administrative staff who work in a child protection setting, and the direct supervisors of frontline staff.

The research suggests that vicarious trauma is an inevitable, adaptive and normative outcome of child protection work, but which can be part of the process of staff members personally attributing meaning and hope to their jobs.

It adds that specific strategies and resources could be applied to address the problem and promote the emotional health of workers.

## A different identity: An exploration of identity for children in foster care

**Research into how Indigenous children in foster care develop a sense of identity was presented based on a study of children under care and protection orders in the Mackay/Whitsunday region of Queensland.**

Michelle Moss, Child Safety Officer from the Mackay Area Office, asserts that developing a sense of identity is one of the most important elements in achieving good outcomes for children in foster care.

The study suggests that Indigenous and psychological concepts of identity may be completely opposite, making this an important area of investigation.

As a result, it challenges current understanding of "Indigenous" and current frameworks within Australian child welfare practice.

The research was based in the Mackay/Whitsunday region, as the majority of children in the child protection system in the area who are identified as Indigenous come from two or more cultural backgrounds.

## The policy implications of performance measurement in child protection

**A study of child protection performance measuring tools was a fitting topic for this year's conference, providing an insight into how these tools are used in the development of child protection policy and practice.**

Clare Tilbury, Acting Child Safety Director in the Department of Communities, asserts that the way performance measurement is implemented has major consequences for service delivery.

The study found that current performance measurement concentrates on investigation and out-of-home care, directing policy attention and resources to these aspects of child protection at the expense of more preventative and supportive work with families.

It recommends performance measurement in child protection should be broadened to include family support as this may help close the gap between policy and practice.

# Alternative care kits up for foster carer recruitment

## FEATURE STORY

**A new information kit released this month is set to provide potential foster carers with a more comprehensive overview of fostering at their first point of inquiry.**

Launched by Child Safety Director-General Robin Sullivan at the Mt Gravatt area office during Child Protection Week, the Foster Carer Information Kit is a suite of materials being developed in the initial stage of a larger foster carer recruitment project.

The kit contains a series of brochures and fact sheets about the types of fostering and the steps to becoming a carer.

Alternative Care Unit Director Kim Woolgar said the information kit would be available to people who contacted the department and expressed interest in becoming a carer.

“Many people call the department with much enthusiasm and the best intentions, but often have a limited knowledge of what is actually involved in becoming a foster carer,” Kim said.

“The kit will help these people make an informed decision about fostering, as well as prepare them for the rewarding and challenging journey ahead,” she said.

South east Queensland foster carers and representatives from Foster Care Queensland, Create Foundation, Peakcare and Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Forum (QAIHF), the peak body for the state’s 17 Aboriginal and Islander community controlled health services, attended the launch.

Kim said the next part of stage one would see the department working closely with alternative care peak bodies and agencies to develop an information kit tailored to the needs of non-government foster care agencies and a recruitment toolkit to assist them in planning local recruitment activities.

She said the information kits would assist departmental and non-government staff by improving the consistency and quality of materials supplied to potential carers throughout Queensland.

“First impressions are important. These kits will help to make the first experience people have with fostering and foster carer service providers a positive one,” she said.

“As part of stage one, we will also produce and distribute recruitment toolkits to enable zones to work together with their non-government partners to effectively plan and conduct local foster carer recruitment activities that meet the needs of their communities.

“We are currently working with non-government agencies and Child Safety alternative care workers to create this Community Recruitment Activity Toolkit.

“The toolkit will provide practical advice based on trialed and proven recruitment activities, step-by-step guidance to planning recruitment strategies and a series of promotional materials.”

Kim said the toolkit would be trialed and tested in a zonal office before being progressively released to all departmental offices.

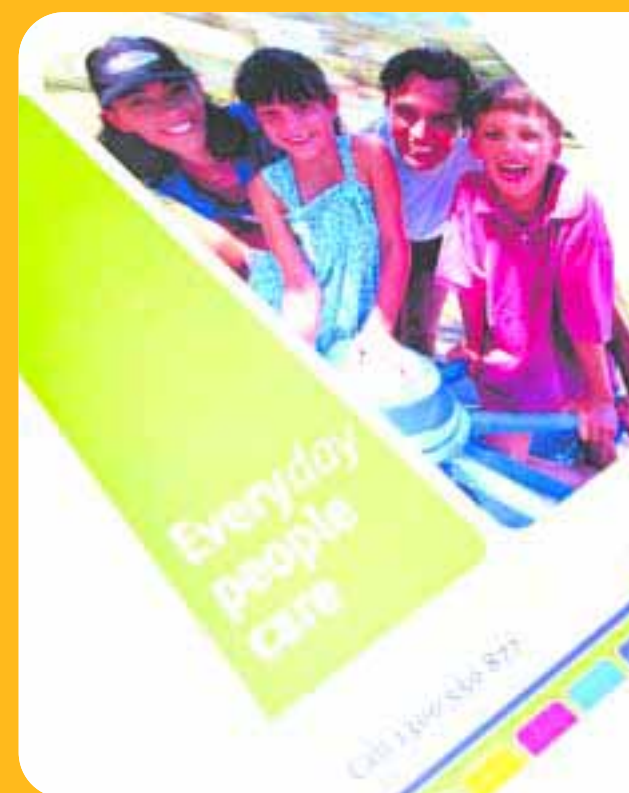
The foster carer recruitment campaign follows the Blueprint recommendations to increase the number and diversity of foster carers.

“We are committed to implementing the Blueprint recommendations to develop community awareness and local recruitment strategies,” Kim said.

“Once these information resources and recruitment tools are released we will embark on the second stage of the campaign, which involves broader state-wide awareness building exercises to promote the valued role of carers and welcome new carers.

“We are also developing improved training and assessments procedures to ensure quality carers are recruited and retained,” she said.

“Many people call the department with much enthusiasm and the best intentions, but often have a limited knowledge of what is actually involved in becoming a foster carer.”



PROMOTIONAL GEAR FOR THE FOSTER CARE RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN

## Working together makes team dream come true

**A spectacular team effort saw the Department of Child Safety's Logan Area Office celebrating in August after processing more than 1000 child protection notifications in just four months.**

In a fine example of inter-region cooperation, Ipswich and Redcliffe Area Offices and the Local and Post Adoption Unit provided staff to support the team, which was established in April to process the ever growing number of child protection notifications in the Logan area.

Acting manager for the Logan area office, Loretta Perry, said it was an enormous challenge, but at no time did staff question the task ahead of them.

"From day one, we had an unshakeable belief that as a team we could do this," she said.

"It took four months and 658 hours of overtime for the team to respond to a backlog of more than 1000 child protection notifications.

"We were able to change our systems and at the same time improve our commitment to children and families."

In congratulating the team, newly appointed Child Safety Director-General Robin Sullivan said celebrating achievements was an important part of the department's new culture.

"The problems are always going to be there unless we find a solution – and we, as the department, are the solution.

"Through your hard work and tenacity, all of you, as a team, have been able to work through the overwhelming number of notifications and improve the way you deliver services to the community," she said.

At the celebration, staff including Kathy Dwyer, Jill Frainey, Ken Lumley, Deborah McCarthy, Tom McIntyre and Peter Hand gave individual presentations providing insights into the teamwork and determination used to accomplish the task.

Regional coordinator Jill Frainey said the real winners from the project were the children and families serviced by the area office.

"We have the smart systems, the professional staff and the belief we can do anything," she said.



LOGAN AREA OFFICE STAFF CELEBRATED THEIR ACHIEVEMENT IN AUGUST ALONGSIDE CHILD SAFETY DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL NORELLE DEETH (RIGHT, FRONT ROW) AND DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL STEVE ARMITAGE.

TRAINERS (LEFT TO RIGHT) VICTORIA STARK; KATRINA LEWIS; TRACEY HUGHES; REBECCA HALL; PAUL O'NEILL, MANAGER, TRAINING INITIATIVE PROJECT.

## Child safety officer ranks swell

**Another 14 staff joined the department's child safety officer ranks following a graduation ceremony on 27 August.**

The new recruits were congratulated and welcomed into the Department of Child Safety by Director-General Robin Sullivan at an afternoon function at 111 George Street, Brisbane.

The event marked their completion of the eight-week Child Safety Officers (CSOs) Entry Training course - the fifth to be completed since February this year. More than 100 graduates have completed the program in that time.

The latest group came predominantly from throughout south east Queensland, but included participants from as far away as Emerald. Participants had differing levels of experience ranging from new appointments through to some officers who have had several months of experience.

Ms Sullivan said she particularly wanted to recognise the personal sacrifice of participants from outside Brisbane who had to spend significant time away from family and friends.

"I sincerely appreciate the commitment and sacrifices that the group, their families and supporters have made," she said.

Another 80 places will be offered before the end of the financial year, with more than 200 places scheduled for 2005.

Training Initiative Project manager Paul O'Neill said lecture style training had been minimised in the program. Instead, the courses involve a simulated office environment on a range of activities that closely match those experienced in the 'real work' environment.

"Problem-centred learning approaches have been used to encourage collegiate decision making and problem solving. Learning from each other has been encouraged," Paul said.

"Outside agencies were also involved to further enhance community partnerships.

"The graduates were able to learn about the services provided by community agencies and to apply this knowledge to mock cases that they were managing as part of their training."

The involvement of non-government agencies in program development was welcomed by Paul, who said the links would be further strengthened in future courses.

"An initiative of Foster Care Queensland will mean the next round of programs will include a half-day placement with a foster carer, and we also plan to extend the course to allow all new CSOs to spend two weeks in a community organisation," he said.

To successfully complete the Entry Level Program, participants have already had to complete a four-week block of training, followed by a two-week long workplace placement and then a further two weeks of off-the-job training.

Over the next nine months, they will have to complete a full on-the-job assessment against all of the competency standards for the CSO role.



# Indigenous partnership to improve child protection services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

**An Indigenous child protection partnership will work with the Department of Child Safety to establish and strengthen services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait children and their families across the state.**

In August, the department allocated more than \$380,000 to the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Forum (QAIHF) to support the ongoing operation of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Partnership over the next 12 months.

QAIHF is the existing peak body for the 17 Aboriginal and Islander community controlled health services in Queensland and has already formed a partnership with ten of the state's 11 currently funded Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies (AICCAs) and the Cape York Health Council, Apunipima.

Indigenous issues project manager for the department's child safety implementation unit, Angela Leitch, said the funding would significantly build the capacity of Indigenous organisations to respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

"The importance of having Indigenous child protection agencies operating in their local communities cannot be underestimated," Angela said.

"Their work is pivotal to ensuring that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people live in safe environments and are able to achieve their full potential.

"The role of QAIHF and the department's implementation unit will be to assist these local organisations to operate efficiently and deliver services that are responsive to their local needs."

The funding will enable the Indigenous child protection partnership to work collaboratively with the department to implement recommendations from the Crime and Misconduct Commission Inquiry into abuse of children in foster care.

These recommendations are focused on addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people who have been in contact with the child protection system.

The Blueprint for reform provides a significant increase in funding for Indigenous child protection organisations to provide services to this target group, including funding for a peak body for Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies. The funding of the partnership is the first stage in creating this peak body.

Angela said that an interconnecting key priority for the partnership would be to strengthen and support the development of a sustainable AICCA network.

"The Blueprint envisages that the structure and role of the eventual peak body for AICCAs will be decided by all AICCAs once they are established.

"As part of the department's Indigenous reforms, current AICCAs will be strengthened and new AICCAs established over the next 12 to 18 months.

"A huge amount of work has already been done by individual agencies and QAIHF to establish the partnership and progress issues affecting the health, safety and overall wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families."

The funding will cover QAIHF's staff, travel and operational costs in working with the department to support the establishment of the new Indigenous child protection services.

QAIHF will also focus on the development of a five-year plan for Indigenous child protection in Queensland, play a secretariat role for the partnership and act as an advocate for Indigenous child protection issues with the department, the child protection service system and the broader community.

## New client info system to be phased in

**The core business information systems that support the state's youth justice and child protection activities are currently undergoing a rigorous examination that will see them phased out gradually.**

The Integrated Client Management System (ICMS) Project is currently examining the existing FamYJ and CPS information systems used by the Child Safety and Communities' Departments to understand them from a business and technical perspective.

The aim of this technological health check is to help identify how the new information system can be integrated with the existing ones to support a phased approach to implementing some ICMS functionality.

The FamYJ system supports both youth justice and child protection, while CPS solely supports child protection.

The ICMS, a project under the umbrella of the Information Renewal Initiative Program, will implement a new client management system in phases starting in early 2005 and replacing many of the existing systems including FamYJ and CPS.

The project has established an Integration Team to develop interfaces between the new system, FamYJ and CPS.

The team is currently working to develop an integration strategy that includes conducting a feasibility study to be completed by early October 2004.

ICMS integration team leader Graham Friedrich said the study would examine the capability of interfacing and synchronising the ICMS with FamYJ to allow a phased implementation.

"Implementation may involve releasing a portion of the new functionality to a small area of the department, then moving on to a larger area of the department and so on," Graham said.

"It would basically mean the new system would be released in increments."

"Most of the interfaces will be interim in nature so that those who do not immediately have access to the new system would be able to view its information via the legacy system interface (FamYJ)."

As the department reviews associated business processes, these changes will also affect the timing of the phased introduction of the ICMS and increase the complexity of integration with FamYJ.

For further information, please contact the Information Renewal Initiative on 3033 0160.

## Personal insight to build local cultural awareness

**For Child Safety Support Officers Bridie McGrady and Liz Jackson, teaching staff how to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and agencies is a familiar part of their daily work.**

In August, Bridie and Liz combined this knowledge and their lifetime experiences to launch the first localised cross-cultural awareness training program for Browns Plains Area Office staff.

Bridie and Liz said the new half-day training program would give staff a better understanding of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies, cultural groups and families in the area.

“It’s important that staff know the correct protocols to follow and how to effectively communicate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and groups,” Bridie said.

“We are arming staff with the knowledge they need to use when working with Indigenous clients, such as which member of the community they should speak to before they place a child into care,” she said.

The open-forum training session explores tribes in the local area and gives practical tips on how to interpret body language and use interpreters to aid with language barriers.

It also provides a deeply personal and historical look at the treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through a series of videos, discussions and a guest speaker from a recognised agency.

“It’s important for people to understand where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people come from and what their families have experienced.

“We hope that staff will go away from the training with a different attitude and a better understanding of why children need to be placed with carers from their own cultural background,” Bridie said.

Recently appointed staff members and training participants Phill Capra and Katie Grossman can both testify to the value of the program.

“I’ve come from working on the north side of Brisbane and don’t know a lot about Indigenous groups in this area,” Phill said.

“This training has helped me to learn about specific families and communities, as well as who to contact from Indigenous agencies.”

Katie said the training helped staff to realise that, although the Government had changed its practices, many families were still affected by the past.

“It’s good to learn about the history of this area and know how I can build relationships with local Indigenous agencies so I can work with them when doing my job,” she said.

The training program is to be held on a regular basis and will expand to include training for new staff members, refresher courses for existing staff and management training.

Browns Plains area manager Tim Hetherington commended the work of Bridie and Liz in establishing the training program.

“I am delighted Bridie and Liz have started this initiative, and I am full of admiration for their work.”

Speaking at the launch of the training program, Tim said the challenge for staff members was looking beyond a broad awareness of the past.

“We need a deeper understanding of what happened here in Browns Plains.

“It is important for us to understand this place and area,” he said.



BRIDIE MCGRADY (LEFT) AND LIZ JACKSON

## Maryborough on the move

**Perhaps one of the biggest signs of positive change at the Maryborough Area Office is that staff in the adjoining Disability Services Queensland office are no longer shy about popping in to use shared facilities.**

A series of team development sessions has broken down old barriers and helped strengthen key internal and external relationships, according to Maryborough Area Office Manager Lyn Healy.

Ms Healy said the sessions were part of a structural reform program which commenced in April this year and aimed to streamline internal processes so better services could be delivered to clients.

“Before April, the teams in our office were very separate in that the administration staff did very different work from the field staff and there was little cross fertilisation,” Ms Healy said.

“But through our team development sessions and with the help of an external consultant we are looking at different ways of doing things and staff are very receptive to this.

“For example we want to ‘attach’ administration staff to field teams and work more closely with Disability Services Queensland to ensure better care of dual clients,” she said.

External relationships with key community agencies have also been significantly strengthened.

The Maryborough Area Office, Shared Family Care Agency and Riverton maternal and child health service in Brisbane recently worked together to tailor a support program to assist a young mother reunite with her children who were in care.

“When the mother returned from Riverton we didn’t feel she was quite ready to look after her children independently, so working with the Shared Family Care Agency we arranged supported accommodation with an on-call worker for her,” Ms Healy said.

“The family is now living independently and the Shared Family Care Agency and the Maryborough Area Office provide ongoing, but not necessarily round-the-clock, support.”

Ms Healy said another agency the Office was working very closely with was the federally-funded Reconnect agency which assists young people at risk of homelessness.

She said Reconnect was currently assisting the Office implement a transition from care program for an 18-year-old girl who was no longer in care but still attending high school.

“Community support is more sustainable than statutory support,” Ms Healy said.

“By working more closely with community agencies we are able to provide better care for our clients from first contact until completion of the intervention.”

# Community visitors - protecting our children's future

**Queensland children living in alternative care will soon have greater protection due to the expansion of the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian's Community Visitor program.**

The changes, which came into effect on 1 September this year, mean that as well as visiting residential facilities, Community Visitors can now visit all children and young people in foster care.

The expansion has forced a huge rise in the number of part-time Community Visitors around the state – up from 25 to 175.

Acting Commissioner for Children and Young People Barry Salmon said Community Visitors had already been visiting children in residential facilities including SAAP services, detention centres and authorised mental health services for some years.

Mr Salmon said it was reassuring to know that children in foster care would now have access to the same levels of support and advocacy as children in residential care.

“Community Visitors will begin visiting children in foster care from this month, and they can feel assured that they will be visited regularly by a dedicated visitor,” Barry said.

“Community Visitors provide support and help to resolve any concerns children may have about their placement, schooling, contact with their family or the handling of their case by the Department,” he said.

“They will generally meet with children or young people in their foster homes, and try to talk with them privately.

“If the child requests, they may meet them somewhere nearby like a park, depending on the child's age and level of maturity.”

If issues arise, Community Visitors generally try to resolve matters at a local level first, and may contact the relevant Child Safety Service Centre.

If unsuccessful, and the matter is serious, it may result in a formal recommendation being made by the Commissioner to the Director-General of the Department of Child Safety.

The visits to children in foster care stem from the recommendations of the Crime and Misconduct's Inquiry into the abuse of children in foster care, and were outlined in Blueprint.

Mr Salmon said foster carers were valued partners of the Community Visitor program and with their support, Community Visitors would be able to visit children in their care at a time that suited the child, the carer and their family.

“The Commission has established a good relationship with foster carers in this state, and we will continue this positive collaboration in the best interests of the children,” Barry said.

“The visits will not interfere in the great work done by our foster carers, but it is important we provide children and young people with an opportunity to speak up and seek help or advice if needed.

“I have written to carers to give them initial information about the program, and Community Visitors will give them a comprehensive booklet on their role and responsibilities when they first visit each foster home.

“If carers have concerns or questions about the actions of a Community Visitor, it is important they speak to the Manager of the Community Visitor program at the Commission.”

The expansion to the Community Visitor program will have some implications for the role of Child Safety Officers.

Child Protection Branch Director Cathy Taylor said officers might be asked to provide some basic information to a Community Visitor about the children and young people they will visit, and relevant contact information is also to be shared.

This information might include things such as the child or young person's name, date of birth, their age and gender.

More detailed information may be provided. For example, if the child has a disability, information about that child's needs and requirements could be provided to the Community Visitor to facilitate communication.

“Child Safety Officers may also be approached to help resolve a concern or issue that a child or young person may express to a Community Visitor,” Cathy said.

“Child Safety Officers will work collaboratively with Community Visitors to resolve issues or concerns at a local level.

“Any issues that cannot be resolved at a local level between the officer and Community Visitor should be referred to the officer's team leader or manager and the Commission.”

## Reforms build safety net for Queensland children

**Queensland children and young people in the care of the state will soon be monitored by an independent child guardian and listened to by more Community Visitors under changes to child safety legislation.**

The reforms stem from the Blueprint delivered in March 2004 and are the first in a series of staged legislative amendments over the next two years designed to improve Queensland's child safety system.

Director of the Department of Child Safety's Child Protection Branch, Cathy Taylor, said the changes would ensure the rights of the most vulnerable children in our society were fully protected by making government departments more accountable for the decisions that impact on their lives.

“These reforms will add an extra blanket of security for children in state protective care by ensuring the agencies that have responsibility for caring for them are open to more scrutiny and there are more avenues for voicing their concerns,” Cathy said.

“Children will also benefit from an increase in the quality of the services they receive as a result these added protective mechanisms.”

The seven changes that came into effect 1 September 2004 include:

- The principles for the administration of the *Child Protection Act 1999* will be re-ordered
- The appointment of the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian to monitor the care provided by the Department of Child Safety
- The Child Guardian will be able to ask the Children Services Tribunal to review Department of Child Safety decisions
- Child death case review functions will be established within the Department of Child Safety, Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian
- The Community Visitors Program will be expanded to include children in alternative care including foster care
- The Department of Child Safety can respond to concerns about the safety of unborn children
- Departments involved in the provision of child protection services will be required to report on these activities annually

## COMMUNITY PARTNER ADVERTISING



### 2004 QCOSS CONFERENCE ENABLING COMMUNITIES ENGAGING THE FUTURE

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BRISBANE CONVENTION & EXHIBITION CENTRE

Enabling communities: Engaging the future marks a turning point in the development of communities and community organisations. It's time to examine our values, renew our assertiveness and tap into our demonstrated ability to deliver solutions.

This event will create a space for all sectors to come together and engage with the important concepts of communities and community organisations – not as romantic concepts but as powerful vehicles that respect diversity, build sustainable relationships, create action and work for justice.

Communities and community organisations are a powerhouse of ideas and practical solutions.

We invite you to join us as we create a future vision of communities – enabling communities – capable of responding to the needs of disadvantaged people and communities.

#### The impressive list of confirmed presenters includes:

Nahid Karimi - Seventeen year old Afghani Refugee, Holroyd High School

Robert Fitzgerald AM - Productivity Commission

Professor Boris Frankel - Researcher and author

Rick Farley - Environmentalist

Jan Owen - Social Ventures Australia

Michael Raper - Welfare Rights Network

Cr Bill Trevor - Mayor, Isis Shire Council

Susan Johnson - Queensland Resources Council

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Rhonda Galbally AO - Our Community

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