

# COLLABORATING TO ACHIEVE BETTER CHILD PROTECTION OUTCOMES

A Practice Paper by the Planning and Partnerships Unit, Queensland Child Protection Sector

## Executive Summary

The Queensland Department of Child Safety has embraced a new framework of government and community partnership – one that is designed to improve service planning and delivery in the State's child protection sector. Through a multi-level planning and partnerships network, the department and its partners are scoping and shaping services in a way that fuses partnerships into service planning and delivery.

## Introduction

The safety of children and young people is an issue that impacts upon the entire community. As such, child protection requires a whole-of-community response. While the Queensland Government Department of Child Safety is the lead child protection agency in the State, it is only one of the many organisations working in the area of child abuse and neglect. The department recognises that an effective child protection service delivery system relies on coordinating across and building capacity within, government agencies, non-government child protection organisations and the community.

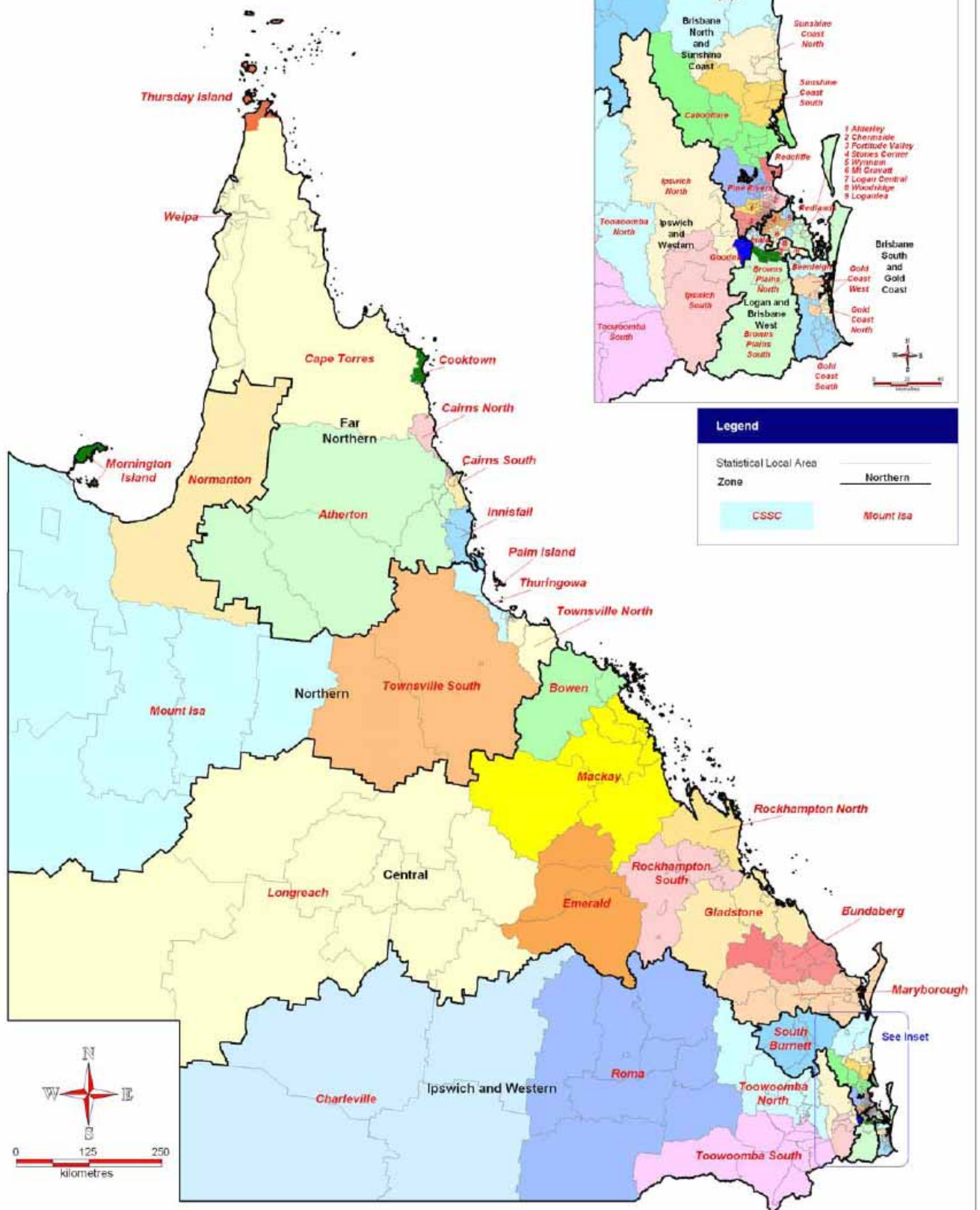
The participation of non-government partners in service planning and delivery is critical. Currently, the department funds approximately 200 non-government organisations to work collaboratively with the government sector in providing appropriate child protection responses. In 2005–06, almost \$100 million is being invested into service delivery through non-government organisations. Furthermore, because of the non-government agencies' close links with the community; they have important contributions to make to developing, planning, implementing and monitoring services.

The 2004 Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) Report *Protecting Children: An Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Foster Care* called for the strengthening of partnerships between non-government and government sectors to deliver a more responsive and integrated approach to child protection. As a response to the partnership issues raised in the CMC report, the department, the non-government child protection sector and other government agencies are pioneering new structural arrangements to work in partnership at the state, regional and local level. These partnerships are designed to improve coordination, cooperation and collaboration around practice, service delivery planning and policy development. Furthermore, these structural arrangements realise a shared responsibility for meeting the needs of children, young people and their families can be achieved through a collaborative network approach to service planning and delivery.

This practitioner paper will:

- explain why strengthening partnerships was seen as an integral step in reforming the Queensland child protection sector;
- present a network arrangement model of partnerships at a state, regional and local level; and
- demonstrate an innovative methodology for evaluating the impact strengthened partnerships is having on the Queensland child protection sector.

**Department of Child Safety  
Zone by Child Safety Service Centre  
by Statistical Local Area (a)**



(a) Full list of zone by child safety service centre by statistical local area is available from DCHS Infonet.

Digital boundaries based on ASGC 2003 Edition.

## Reforming Queensland's Child Protection Sector

After reviewing the child protection operations of the then Queensland Department of Families, the Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) recommended the establishment of a separate stand alone government agency, the Department of Child Safety (DChS).

The extent of systemic failings within the Department of Families identified in ... this report has persuaded the Commission that these cannot be remedied through a process of incremental reform.

It is for this reason that the Commission proposes the creation of a new Department of Child Safety (DChS), directed towards meeting the needs of children at risk and undistracted by any other tasks or goals. This department must not be expected to bear responsibility for all aspects of child protection, in terms of either prevention or response. If too great a burden is placed upon the department it will be destined to fail. Child protection must be recognised by government as being the responsibility of a wide range of agencies collectively participating in a whole-of-government commitment to the wellbeing of children. (p136)

The report also highlighted the need for the new department to “establish a strong partnership with the non-government agencies to provide an efficient system that meets the protection needs of children”.

Service models that focus more on joint capacity building are more likely to result in an integrated service model that focuses on the partnership between agencies and government (Department of Human Services [Vic.] 2003a).

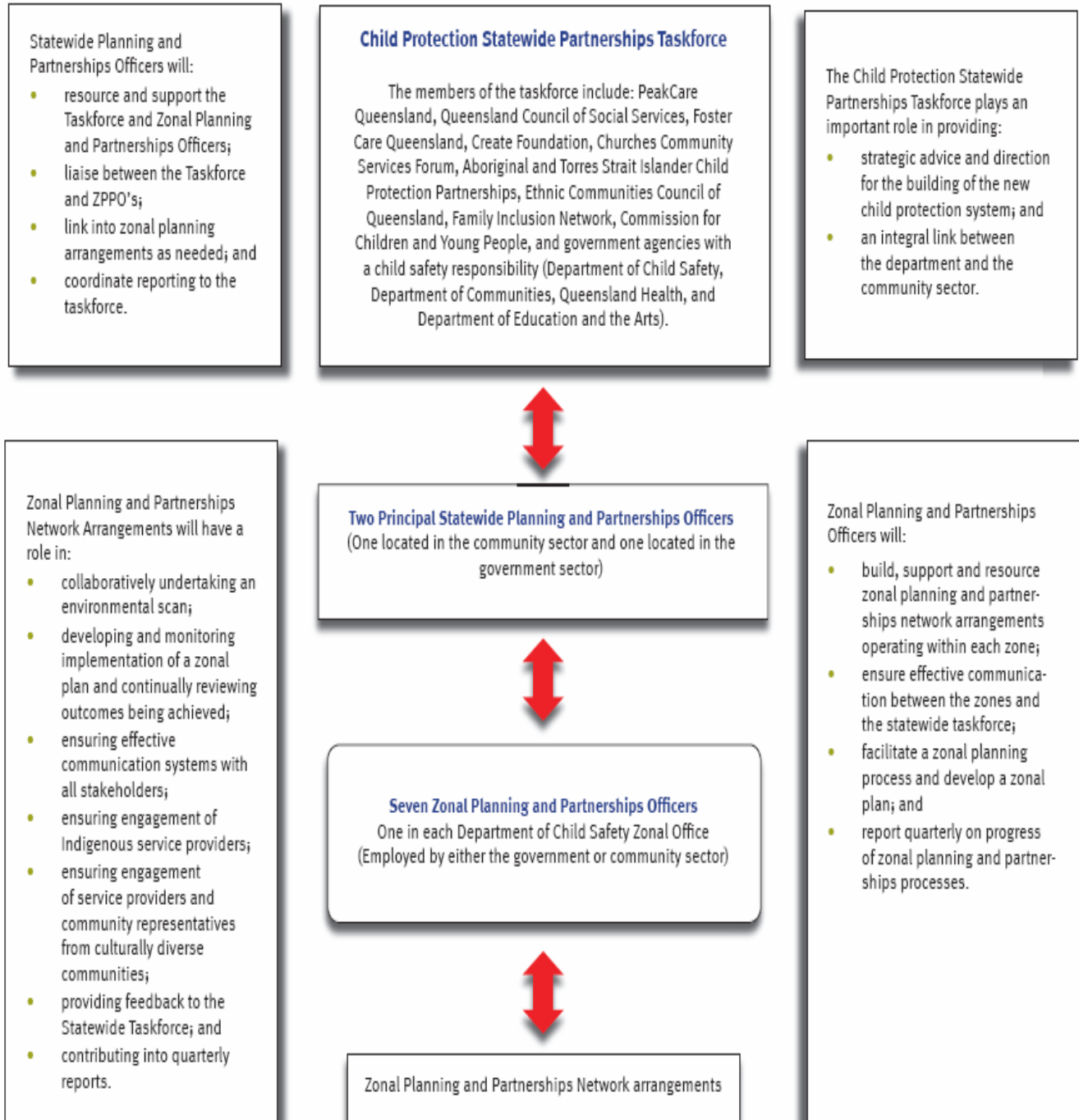
Based on this the CMC recommended “that a more progressive and contemporary integrated service delivery model, which creates a partnership between government and non government organisations to deliver better services for clients of the child protection system, be developed.” (p180).

The *Blueprint for implementing the CMC report recommendations* (Blueprint) presented a plan of action for implementing the 110 recommendations outlined in the CMC Inquiry Report. The Blueprint acknowledged the CMC's expectation of an integrated service delivery model be developed, based on effective partnerships, needs based planning, realistic funding levels, and an effective mix of regulatory and quality control mechanisms.

The Blueprint agreed that the “improved partnerships will improve integration and the needs based focus of the service delivery system. Government can expect that the improvements will build on the existing strengths of the government, non-government and voluntary foster carer systems, reducing overlaps and improving communication between those sectors.” (p184)

## Planning and Partnerships Structure

The Blueprint proposed the establishment of a planning and partnerships network encompassing the statewide and zonal levels as one mechanism for strengthening relationships across the child protection sector. The structural arrangement is outlined below:



The Child Protection Statewide Partnerships Taskforce is a joint government/non-government body that has a strategic role in building the new child protection system, with a particular focus on developing the range and mix of services available to children at risk, appropriate funding models and quality systems.

## COLLABORATING TO ACHIEVE BETTER CHILD PROTECTION OUTCOMES

The Statewide Taskforce is supported by two Statewide Principal Planning and Partnerships Officers - one located within the government sector (Department of Child Safety) and one located in the community sector (auspiced by PeakCare Queensland).

Furthermore, there is a dedicated Zonal Planning and Partnerships Officer (ZPPO) in each of the seven Department of Child Safety zones - located in either the government or non-government sector - to resource planning networks at the local level.

The Zonal Planning and Partnerships Officer's role is to facilitate child safety planning processes in partnership with stakeholders from other non-government and government agencies, and other stakeholders such as foster carers, with an interest in child safety.

Zonal Planning and Partnerships Officers are tasked with:

- building, supporting and resourcing zonal planning and partnerships arrangements operating within each zone;
- ensuring effective communication between zones and the Statewide Taskforce; and
- facilitating zonal planning processes and developing a zonal plan.

This structural arrangement strengthens relationships at both a strategic level and at a service delivery level to enable the flow of communication and information across the child protection system.

The initiative recognises that structural arrangements alone do not produce a meaningful and sustainable partnership between key stakeholders. For this to occur, attention is constantly being paid to the development, implementation and continuous review of processes and relationships upon which the successful implementation of structures ultimately depend.

## Partnerships in Practice at the State Level

The Planning and Partnerships initiative commenced mid-2004 with the establishment of the Child Protection Statewide Partnership Taskforce. The Taskforce is a body made up of peak non-government agencies representing child protection services, children and young people and their families, foster carers, Indigenous entities, culturally and linguistically diverse bodies and broader social services.

The purpose of the Taskforce is to improve outcomes for children and young people who have, or are at risk of, experiencing harm, and their families.

The Taskforce does this by:

- **Capacity Building** - identifying strengths, gaps and weaknesses that require a whole of system approach and strategies to address these, in order to build a viable, sustainable, seamless, integrated service system that effectively responds to needs of children, young people and their families, through the Planning and Partnerships Initiative.
- **Facilitating Partnerships** - leading the facilitation of partnerships by modelling, identifying and creating opportunities, and supporting and resourcing the ongoing development and operation of partnership arrangements across the continuum at individual, community and statewide levels.

These purpose statements are not discrete and are overlaid by recognition that outcomes for children, young people and their families can only be achieved by an integrated continuum of service responses. This means engaging those service providers and systems that interface (or should) with children and young people who have, or are at risk of, experiencing harm, and their families.

The Taskforce's 2006–2007 Work Program is actively pursuing an analysis of the child protection service system from the perspective of child protection stakeholders. The Taskforce has commenced this process by collaboratively analysing placement and support services through profiling and exploring innovations and challenges within the placement and support sector.

## Partnerships in Practice at the Local Level

Zonal Planning and Partnerships processes commenced early in 2005, however appointment of officers have staggered the delivery of the initiative. Whilst the goal and roles of the Zonal Planning and Partnerships Officers is consistent across the State, it has been acknowledged that the methodology for implementing genuine partnerships at the zonal level is flexible to accommodate the great variations in the geography (eg. size, distance between locations), demographic diversity and service infrastructure across the zones. Below are some zonal examples of how “partnerships” are being established. A map of Queensland and the Department of Child Safety zonal boundaries can be found on page 2.

### Brisbane South & Gold Coast Zone

The Brisbane South and Gold Coast Zone covers the area south of the Brisbane CBD west to Wynnum and Redlands and south to Beenleigh and the Gold Coast as far as the New South Wales border. The southern part of the zone experiences high urban growth, areas of disadvantage and a high level of transience. High levels of disadvantage along with extremely limited human services are experienced by the southern bay islands.

At this stage, the zonal focus has been on developing partnerships between the DChS, non-government agencies and key government departments with the aim of developing strong relationships that will lead to collaborative planning processes across the zone. To undertake future zonal planning the zone has been clustered around specific service system communities, as follows:

- Brisbane South;
- Bayside and Bay Islands; and
- Beenleigh/Gold Coast.

Initial planning processes are being developed by a team including representatives from zonal Out-of-Home Care staff, the zonal Community Support Team, Child Safety Service Centre Managers, funded agencies and the Zonal Planning and Partnerships Officers.

Foster carer forums have been held in the Beenleigh/Gold Coast cluster where new network and planning arrangements and a range of strategies to better support carers are being developed.

The ZPPO has participated in the establishment of the Child Placement Working Party, to develop alternative placement options for children and young people (eg siblings groups, young people with challenging behaviours, who may be placed in inappropriate accommodation). Membership includes the Department of Child Safety, Department of Communities and relevant non-government organisations involved in placement services.

### Logan and Brisbane West Zone

The Logan and Brisbane West Zone is one of the most compact but challenging zones given historical and continuing pockets of poverty exacerbated by large public housing estates in the Brisbane and Logan local government areas.

The Zonal Planning and Partnerships Officer is currently undertaking a process of identifying and meeting with government and non-government child protection stakeholders within the zone.

## COLLABORATING TO ACHIEVE BETTER CHILD PROTECTION OUTCOMES

The purpose of these meetings is to firstly engage and secondly to identify the local child protection priorities.

A Forum, attended by Child Safety Service Centre Managers and representatives from all the departmentally funded services commenced a planning process about how the funded community sector and the department could partner to build a more responsive child safety service system at the local level.

### Ipswich and Western Zone

Ipswich and Western Zone is a large and diverse zone, encompassing the cities of Ipswich (to Brisbane's immediate west) and the provincial city of Toowoomba, as well as the rural communities in the Brisbane Valley and the wider south west of the State (e.g. Charleville, Roma and St George).

A key piece of partnership development for the zone during 2006 has been the development of an Indigenous Recognised Entity (a service that provides cultural advice to the Department of Child Safety at all stages of child protection work with Indigenous children).

The Zonal Planning and Partnerships Officer's role has been to develop sustainable partnership arrangements with key Indigenous stakeholders, including consultations throughout the zone, particularly in the Roma, Charleville, St George and Cunnamulla areas. It is anticipated that these communities will collaborate in the development of a single multi-location structure to service communities in the South-West.

Ipswich and Western Zone planning and partnerships work has also achieved:

- Child Safety Partnership Networks in Ipswich/Goodna and Toowoomba region consisting of departmental funded non-government services and other community-based organisations;
- integration of child protection responses focused on meeting the needs of Child Safety Service Centres in many aspects of child protection work;
- enhancement of communication channels between the service sector and Child Safety Service Centres, occurring in a collaborative partnership framework; and
- partnership development with Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Currently, the partnership networks in the zone are being expanded to include key representatives from state and federal government departments and non-government agencies including:

- Queensland Health;
- Disability Services Queensland;
- Education Queensland;
- Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs;
- neighbourhood centres;
- family support agencies;
- domestic violence services;
- supported accommodation providers; and

## COLLABORATING TO ACHIEVE BETTER CHILD PROTECTION OUTCOMES

- Indigenous service providers.

The Zonal Planning and Partnerships Officer facilitated the child protection network for the far south west in Charleville in March, in partnership with Queensland Health. Participants representing a diverse range of health and community-based agencies traveled from Quilpie, Roma, Cunnamulla and Toowoomba to join with Charleville practitioners. They achieved a greater understanding of the role of government and community agencies in the child protection continuum.

Participants said that a child protection network would:

- emphasise the child protection responsibilities of all;
- improve sharing of relevant information through communication technologies so that professionals remain up-to-date;
- offer opportunities to clarify legal issues in child protection and inform professionals of the recent changes in child protection legislation;
- ensure that child protection actions are tailored to rural and remote communities' needs.
- challenge practitioners to identify what is working in the far south west; and
- clarify directions and increase skills in prevention and early intervention.

Due to demands of rural and remote practice and the travel involved, participants wanted an email network to be set up. Participants also suggested that an annual face-to-face child protection forum be held late in 2006 in the far south west to share good practice, update knowledge of legislation, improve collaboration, and evaluate networking strategies. Topics suggested were inter-agency ways of working, local achievements, information updates, joint programs underway or being planned and ongoing Child Safety familiarisation.

### Brisbane North and Sunshine Coast Zone

The Brisbane North and Sunshine Coast Zone is the most populated and perhaps one of the most demographically diverse zones as it encompasses the Brisbane CBD and northern suburban corridor, the high growth corridor of Pine Rivers and Caboolture, the Sunshine Coast, and the rural areas of Gympie and the South Burnett. It also has the greatest number of Child Safety Service Centres (ten) within any one Zone.

To reflect this heterogeneity, the Zonal Planning and Partnerships Officer has divided the Zone into five geographic catchments:

- **Brisbane North** – including the Alderley, Chermside, Fortitude Valley and Pine Rivers Child Safety Service Centre (CSSC) catchments
- **Outer North** – including the Caboolture, Pine Rivers and Redcliffe CSSC catchments
- **Sunshine Coast** – based around the Maroochydore and Caloundra CSSCs, and including Noosa Shire Council (covered by the Gympie CSSC);
- **Cooloola** – based on the Cooloola local government authority (serviced by the Gympie CSSC); and
- **South Burnett** – based on the South Burnett CSSC catchment. A separate arrangement is being developed in the Aboriginal community of Cherbourg, however connections will continue with the wider South Burnett.

Child Protection Planning and Partnerships Workshops were held in each community of interest. The workshops were extremely well attended by stakeholders from across the child protection

## COLLABORATING TO ACHIEVE BETTER CHILD PROTECTION OUTCOMES

continuum and demonstrated an enthusiasm within the sector to collaborate in improving outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Particular priorities for the child protection sector identified at the workshops included:

- Greater collaboration amongst the sector including information sharing around referrals and responses, establishing memorandums of understanding between agencies, collaborative service delivery and funding submissions.
- An increased range and number of placement options including residentials, independent living options and Indigenous and culturally/linguistically diverse foster carers.
- Increased capacity within the early intervention and prevention services, specifically parenting programs, protective behaviours, prevention of sexual offending, and family support services.
- Staff recruitment, retention and skill development, specifically within the Department of Child Safety.
- Improved and increased service delivery to children in care (or at imminent risk of entering care) and their families, specifically counselling services for children and disability support.

Participants at each workshop also agreed on a means of actioning the priorities identified. These processes include using existing interagencies and networks, establishing time-limited and focused child protection reference groups, and using e-based technology to share information and improve collaboration.

Some of the network and project work that has grown out of these workshops include:

- collaborative needs analysis and sector development/redevelopment with regards to family support service provision in the Brisbane North catchment;
- development of a collaborative funding submission involving an out-of-home care provider, a therapeutic intervention service, a specialist counselling service and the Department of Child Safety that aims to address emergency placements concerns in the Outer North catchment, as well as providing more detailed therapeutic assessment at the time of entry into the out-of-home care sector, and therefore better matching of the child with an appropriate placement;
- collaborative partnerships designed to meet the needs of children in care on the Sunshine Coast that include integrated case management, joint programs to improve caring for carers, collaborative recruitment of carers, and targeted activities to improve Indigenous placement options; and
- working in partnership to identify needs of families and children, and gaps in service delivery, in Gympie and the South Burnett.

### Central Zone

Central Zone is the largest zone in geographic terms. It stretches along the coast from Maryborough and Hervey Bay in the south, through Bundaberg, Gladstone, Rockhampton and Yeppoon, to Mackay, the Whitsundays and Bowen in the north. It also stretches all the way to the Northern Territory border and includes the inland towns of Emerald and Longreach.

The design of Central Zone's network arrangements is based on principles and themes from the Partnerships Forum held in Rockhampton over 29 and 30 June 2005. All child protection

## COLLABORATING TO ACHIEVE BETTER CHILD PROTECTION OUTCOMES

stakeholders across the zone were invited to attend this Forum to input in to the design of the network arrangements. A sub-group from this forum developed the model for the zone which comprises 6 distinct elements:

1. The Local Child, Family and Community Services Expo aim to increase the referral and support options for clients by increasing awareness of the range of human services available in, or outreaching to, target localities.
2. Regional child protection services mapping workshops aim to identify and articulate child protection service-delivery in each child safety service centre (CSSC) area and provide a platform for productive partnerships between key agencies. The Regional Mapping Workshops are at the heart of planning for the child protection system as they will provide information and analysis on the range and mix of key child protection services.
3. Regional child protection learning exchange forums aim to align key child protection stakeholders in each CSSC region to clarify responsibilities and roles and deliberate on practice and policy matters.
4. The zonal network aims to connect elements of the network arrangements and provide strategic advice about priority issues. Network members represent each CSSC region in the zone.
5. Zonal biennial forums will provide opportunity to discuss issues that affect the whole zone, share good practice stories and research and showcase innovation. The Zonal Network will host the forums.
6. Supporting communication mechanisms aim to enhance information exchange between child protection stakeholders and elements of the network arrangement and provide a feedback loop for all network participants. Newsletters and web pages are examples of these mechanisms.

The various elements of the model reflect the need for different people to come together at different times for different purposes. Implementation of the network arrangement is currently underway.

### Northern Zone

The Northern Zone, geographically, is a large zone (453,188 km<sup>2</sup>) representing 26.1 per cent of Queensland's area. This is comprised of the large regional centres of Townsville and Thuringowa, and remote and complex Indigenous communities such as Palm Island, Doomadgee, Normanton and Mornington Island.

The Zonal Planning and Partnerships process is relatively embryonic in its development with stakeholder workshops commencing in August. The purpose of these workshops is to:

- identify existing gaps, priorities and potential strategies for consideration;
- explore innovative models for more collaborative practice within the child protection sector; and
- achieve stakeholder consensus on progressing the network arrangements including profiling models and partnership agreements.

A database of all stakeholders in child protection has been established. This includes identified government and non-government stakeholders working directly and indirectly in child protection.

## COLLABORATING TO ACHIEVE BETTER CHILD PROTECTION OUTCOMES

Ownership over the planning and partnerships process is paramount before a comprehensive integrated service delivery model can be achieved. To further encourage government departments and organisations to start thinking about working closely together, a newsletter has been introduced called *Northern Zone Update*. This is a newsletter that stakeholders contribute to by sharing information on service delivery and programs offered to clients. It is mailed out electronically every 4-6 weeks. Two newsletters have been produced to-date and it has generated positive interest and feedback within the sector.

### Far Northern

The Far Northern Zone is the northern-most zone in Queensland – stretching from Cardwell Shire in the south to the Gulf of Carpentaria in the west and north to the Papua New Guinea border. The Zone includes a large number of very remote Indigenous communities throughout Cape York and the Torres Strait.

In many of the remote Indigenous communities the proportion of persons aged under 15 years is well in excess of the Queensland average (20.9%). For example, in New Mapoon 45.9% of the population is aged under 15 years and on Hammond Island 50.5% of the population is aged under 15 years. In 12 communities across Cape York and the Torres Strait the proportion of persons aged under 15 years is close to double the State average.

One of the key issues in the Far Northern Zone is the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the Child Protection system - approximately 60% where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people represent 13.5% of the total zonal population.

In the Far Northern Zone, the Zonal Planning and Partnerships Officer is facilitating a multilayered approach, developing planning partnership arrangements with local communities and clusters of communities. During the establishment phase, the Zonal Planning and Partnerships Officer is convening a series of forums across the Far Northern Zone. These forums bring together community and government partners from across the child safety service system. The geographic target areas for the initial forums mirror the catchment areas of the Child Safety Service Centres. As a result of these initial forums and subsequent local forums in some areas, each area has determined the best ways forward for their individual area. For example, in Innisfail there is agreement to progress child safety planning and partnership work through an existing group, namely the Cassowary Coast Communities Against Violence Committee, which was established in response to concerns about domestic and family violence, but whose membership and terms of reference are consistent with those of child safety.

Across the Atherton Tablelands and in the Douglas Shire there is strong community support for a stand-alone network to exclusively focus on Child Safety.

Forum participants report that these processes offer an opportunity to develop better understanding of each others' roles and enhance working relationships.

The Far Northern Zonal Leadership Team identified strong and productive partnerships as one of its five priority areas. This fact, coupled with a strong and historical commitment to working in partnership within the non-government human services sector, provides a firm foundation upon which to build child protection planning and partnership processes in the Far North.

## Other Key Partnerships at the Local Level

The Planning and Partnerships initiative acknowledges that certain key stakeholders – such as children and young people, their families, clients from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds, and Foster Carers – need to be specifically supported to meaningfully engage, and strategies are being developed to facilitate their participation. Some examples of facilitating the participation of specific groups are outlined below:

**Children and Young People:** Within Northern Zone the Zonal Planning and Partnerships Officer's role is integral to building capacity for a joint commitment to child protection issues. The successful progression of a youth advocates group – *OutLoud*, is an example of this.

*OutLoud* is a core group of five young people in care aged between 12 and 17 years. Meetings to support the group have been facilitated between: the Department of Child Safety; Department of Communities; Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian (CCYPCG); Queensland Health; and Townsville City Council. The group of government stakeholders have taken on a steering committee role for *OutLoud*.

The initiative is now on the state-wide agenda through the draft *Children and Young People in Care Participation Strategy 2006–2009*. The draft strategy has been developed by a steering group called *GFORCE*. *GFORCE* has been established to bring key stakeholders together to provide a consistent framework for capturing the voices of children and young people in the development of the draft strategy.

*GFORCE* is currently receiving feedback from across the government and non-government sector before submitting an Action Plan to the Department of Child Safety for implementation.

**Families of children in care or at risk of entering care:** The Family Inclusion Network (FIN) is a network of practitioners and academics committed to the inclusion of biological parents and significant others in the child protection process. FIN are currently collating information on the resources and tools needed by non-government organisations, parents and significant others to uphold inclusion and support best practice. Towards this end, FIN, in collaboration with the Department of Child Safety (via the Zonal Planning and Partnerships Officers) and local community services, is holding workshops with parents with children in care or who are at risk of having their children in care. The workshops are being held in various locations around the state and consider the following topics:

- Parents experiences of the child protection system;
- assistance provided to parents;
- cultural differences;
- recommendations that could be made to improve service support and advocacy for parents; and
- resources needed for non-government organisations and parents to enhance best practice and support.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities** - Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people is a priority for the Logan and Brisbane West Zone. To address this priority the Zonal Management team has established an Indigenous portfolio and the Zonal Planning and Partnerships Officer is a key participant in this.

## COLLABORATING TO ACHIEVE BETTER CHILD PROTECTION OUTCOMES

In March, the Zone also held a two-day forum with representatives from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sectors and the Department of Child Safety. The purpose of this forum was to discuss how to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children within the child protection system at the local level. Key themes identified as requirements for addressing over-representation included:

- early intervention and prevention;
- cultural competence;
- family reunification;
- partnerships and collaboration;
- funding and resources; and.
- recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander foster carers.

A draft plan was developed outlining initial steps to be taken by the department and the respective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to address these priorities.

A similar approach has been developed in the Brisbane South and Gold Coast Zone where an Indigenous Reference Group has been formed to address over representation of Indigenous children and young people in the child protection system. The reference group is proposing to hold a zonal forum to bring together key stakeholders to discuss strategies and develop an action plan. Linkages have also been made with Department of Communities to address planning issues in relation to the needs of Indigenous families on Stradbroke Island.

**Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities** - Over one thousand Sudanese refugees have settled in Toowoomba on Queensland's Darling Downs under the family sponsorship migration program. Responses by mainstream agencies including Child Safety in this conservative inland city of 100,000 people to large multi-generational Sudanese families who have experienced major trauma has been challenging. The Zonal Planning and Partnerships Officer has facilitated departmental workers in providing ongoing education around child abuse and parenting expectations to people who are not literate in their own language.

Similarly, the Zonal Planning and Partnerships Officer in the Brisbane North and Sunshine Coast Zone has facilitated an agreement between the Department of Child Safety, the local government authority and the Caboolture and Redcliffe Multicultural Forum to improve statutory interactions with the significant Pacific Islander community. Actions will include targeted cultural awareness training for staff, education of the community in Queensland child protection expectations, recruitment of Pacific Islander Foster Carers, and recruitment of Pacific Island Child Safety staff.

In Brisbane South and Gold Coast Zone, the Culturally Appropriate Partnership (CAP) has been developed as a response to insufficient culturally appropriate placements for children and young people from CALD backgrounds, the need for suitable training on cultural diversity for Department of Child Safety staff and placement services, and the need to source and develop community education programs around child protection, domestic and family violence, relevant Australian laws and, support services for CALD communities. The CAP involves representatives from a range of key government and non-government agencies who want to reduce CALD representation in the child protection system and ensure culturally appropriate service delivery. The Zonal Planning and Partnerships Officer and the zonal CALD liaison officer have developed a draft Action Plan that provides a training program for department and placement agency staff, community education, and strategies to recruit culturally appropriate carers to meet an emerging need.

## COLLABORATING TO ACHIEVE BETTER CHILD PROTECTION OUTCOMES

**Foster Carers** - In addition to the broad planning and partnerships processes, the Far Northern Zone has a strong focus on the important partnership between Foster Carers and the Department. In late 2005, after several years in hiatus, the Zonal Foster Carer Forum was redeveloped and reinvigorated. The Zonal Foster Carer Forum meets quarterly and is a vibrant forum where foster carers and departmental staff come together. The purpose of the forum is to facilitate relationship building and provide a vehicle for continuous improvement. Meetings are solutions-focussed and follow a standard agenda which includes information sharing and a focussed discussion on what is working, what is not working and what improvements can be made.

Forum members have developed an action plan which identifies priority areas. Joint working groups, comprising foster carers and departmental staff, work on priority areas between meetings and report back to the Forum. Foster carers have a high sense of ownership over, and commitment to, the Forum and contribute to the agenda and actively participate in meetings. The Department's Zonal Director attends and this adds to the potency of the group.

As a direct result of the Forum, improvements are being reported in communication and through better understanding of each others' roles working relationships are being further enhanced.

## Evaluating the Success of Partnerships

From the outset, a rigorous means of evaluating the success of the new planning and partnerships framework was also agreed upon and resourced. Alongside stakeholder surveys and evaluation focus groups, the Child Protection Statewide Partnerships Taskforce has initiated a project with the Queensland University of Technology to apply a Network Analysis methodology to the work being undertaken, particularly that of the Zonal Planning and Partnerships Officers. The methodology is innovative and aims to address the complex issues of evaluating the success of collaborative partnerships using a more appropriate set of tools.

Network analysis is a diagnostic tool for monitoring and evaluating the relationships and links of networked structures. It maps and measures (visually) the movement and growth of networked structures over time. In particular, network analysis can monitor and map the:

- **size** of the network – the number of partners involved within a specific network;
- **density** of the network – the actual connections each partner has with other partners; and
- **clustering** of networks – extent to which a network may have subgroups/cliques.

Dr Myrna Mandell and Dr Robyn Keast from Queensland University of Technology's School of Management recently summarised the need for such a methodology in the following abstract:

As public problems have become more and more complex, there has been a realization that individual government agencies, working alone, can no longer handle these "wicked issues". Instead, there has been a growing emphasis on replacing categorical or program-based funding arrangements with more integrated efforts. These efforts have been the focus of recent work on collaborative endeavors involving a variety of network arrangements. The difficulty has been that although these types of collaborative efforts are increasing in number, there is a related growing concern as to whether these efforts have been any more effective than those involving single agency efforts. As a result, there has been an increased interest in evaluating these types of efforts. However, the evaluation measures used are those that apply to individual organizations, rather than network arrangements that often include not only representatives of public sector organizations, but also representatives of nonprofit and private organizations as well as individuals and groups representing community interests. What is needed are new ways of evaluating performance in these network arrangements.

The key to effective performance in these types of efforts is not on achieving tasks, but rather on the ability to change existing structural arrangements (and relationships). The outcomes that make a difference in network arrangements therefore are the ability to develop revised procedures, develop new relationships and new ways of working and put into place the processes necessary to change structural arrangements. The emphasis needs to be on integration among diverse members to work as a new whole. As a result, the traditional evaluation measures such as tasks completed or clients served are no longer appropriate. Instead new measures that focus on both intangible results, such as changed values and attitudes and building trust as well as tangible results, such as changes in existing structural arrangements, procedures and rules and regulations will need to come to the fore.

To this end, a number of Zonal Planning and Partnerships Officers have encouraged their network members to participate in Network Linkage Surveys – surveys that seek input on an agencies degree of linkage with other agencies in the sector. Information from the surveys is entered into a software program, producing visual reports that demonstrate the level of connectedness existing within a network or sector. These surveys and reports can be repeated over time, leading to analysis and evaluation of the success or otherwise of the network to improve connectivity and collaboration.

## Key Learnings and Challenges

As the initiative is progressively implemented, partners at all levels are identifying a range of challenges, opportunities and learnings. Some of the key learning and challenges experienced by the planning and partnerships team are outlined below:

- There has been the need to slowly change the **culture** within the sector to one that recognises that the various partners bring different perspectives and expertise, that when combined produce better outcomes. The challenge has been to create an environment in which these experiences, perspectives and expertise can be shared and acknowledged.
- For **responsibility** to be shared, government agencies need to be open to facilitating participative and collaborative decision making, and the non-government sector, particularly the peak bodies, to take the opportunity to influence change amongst their own constituents. This starts by all parties engaging and drawing upon the knowledge and skills of their own staff and/or membership.
- There are considerable **differences** between statewide and zonal influences and responsibilities across the sector and this is seen as strengths and opportunities to build upon. Working on both a statewide and local / zonal level the initiative understands that often it is easier to collaborate around a specific and immediate problem or issue. At a strategic level collaborating to improve policy and systems is a long hard road.
- Partnerships take **time!** Establishing a functioning Taskforce at the state level has taken time, as has establishing network arrangements in the zones. Tangible outcomes may still seem very distant. Some times you lose key partners because the process is slow. However, educating partners that the process is part of the outcome is important.
- Working within a statutory child protection system with established **boundaries** requires a clear understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities.
- A lot of the partnership work is about collecting, collating and disseminating **information** at the state and zonal levels. Information is power!
- There is a real need to **engage** and develop specific strategies that facilitates the participation of children and young people in care, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, CALD communities, and families in the process. Creating opportunities for their involvement can prove challenging, but also very rewarding, and leads to better outcomes.
- In a sector that is continuing to operate largely in **crisis**, it can be hard for partners to see that investing in improving partnerships is worthwhile. The aims and benefits of partnership and collaborative planning get consumed by the need for immediate action.
- Thinking about the process as developmental is important. The establishment of structures is only one part of the puzzle. What has been learnt from this experience is **joint action and purpose** will truly mobilise a partnership.
- The program has demonstrated the importance of **sharing** learnings, not only from across the State, but from other jurisdictions in Australia and internationally.
- Queensland is a large state with a **dispersed population**. The mechanics of bringing partners together proves challenging. This also has impacts on the ability of the sector to provide service coverage to the more rural and remote regions of the State.
- **Suspicion** within certain parts of the sector, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, is ongoing. Partnerships need to start by overcoming historical hostile interactions or perceptions.

## COLLABORATING TO ACHIEVE BETTER CHILD PROTECTION OUTCOMES

- Partnership is **not a new idea** (there is a recognition that many communities and service providers have been doing this well for a long time). For Queensland it is, however, probably one of the first times it has been resourced. It is important for the program to acknowledge this history and look to demonstrate outcomes.
- Money isn't everything, but it is quickly becoming apparent that greater **flexibility in funding** the community sector, and rewarding collaboration financially, will be instrumental to the success of this program.
- Having said all this, the initiative has a strong **commitment** from all the partners to the concepts and all are willing to give it a go – their ongoing enthusiasm will be based on what they are able to get out of it.

## Replicability

The local level networks of the Planning and Partnerships initiative are replicated across Queensland in a diversity of contexts, including remote, rural and urban communities, Indigenous communities, and service providers and involving both large peak bodies and local level service providers.

The Planning and Partnerships initiative, although drawing from the experience of other models, is pioneering a genuinely more collaborative approach to service planning and delivery. Early evidence from the Planning and Partnerships initiative indicates that the network approach to dealing with complex child protection issues is an effective model of government and community partnership in planning and service delivery.

## Contact Details

For further information on the Planning and Partnerships Initiative please visit <http://www.childsafety.qld.gov.au/partnerships/index.html> or contact:

Penny Creamer  
Principal Planning and Partnerships Officer  
– Government  
Queensland Department of Child Safety  
ph. 07 3224 8047  
e. [Penny.Creamer@childsafety.qld.gov.au](mailto:Penny.Creamer@childsafety.qld.gov.au)

Tim Johnston  
Principal Planning and Partnerships Officer  
– Community  
Peakcare  
ph. 07 3368 1050  
e. [tjohnston@peakcare.com.au](mailto:tjohnston@peakcare.com.au)