Case study

It is 2pm Friday afternoon. You are a child safety officer in a child safety service centre and you are looking forward to the weekend. However, your team leader has just received information from the Regional Intake Service about suspected abuse of a child from a local school — nine year old Sarah has told her teacher she is afraid to go home. Sarah says her stepfather has been hitting her and her mother does nothing to stop it. The teacher says Sarah appears to have bruises on her arms and legs.

Listening, assessing, planning

Following a briefing by your team leader and negotiations with police and the Department of Education, Training and Employment, you are at the local school with police officers, preparing to interview Sarah about why she is too scared to go home.

You know how important it is to gain Sarah’s trust — you need as much information as possible to understand how Sarah got the bruises on her arms and legs and to be able to assess the risks she might be facing at home.

Liaising, negotiating, communicating

Between the information provided by the school and Sarah, you are getting a good picture of the concerns — it is now time for you and the police to speak with Sarah’s mother and stepfather. They need to know that you have spoken to Sarah and they need the opportunity to respond to the concerns that have emerged.
You know they are likely to be angry or upset and maybe difficult to engage, but you also know that Sarah’s safety is your first priority — especially if it is possible that her parents cannot or will not ensure this.

**Partnership, investigation, safety**
You have managed to get Sarah’s parents to agree for her to have a medical assessment and the results confirm suspected physical abuse. Sarah’s mother and stepfather maintain they do not know how the injuries were caused and who might have caused them. However, Sarah has told you that her stepfather was responsible. You discuss this with her parents and start talking about the options for ensuring Sarah’s immediate safety. Options include other family members or foster carers.

**Conflict resolution, problem solving**
By around 7:30pm you have established that Sarah’s immediate safety needs are best met by a temporary placement with a foster carer. Her parents have consented to this and have agreed to see you on Monday to discuss the issues further. After discussion with your team leader and staff at the after-hours child safety service centre, a placement has been arranged and you drive Sarah to the foster carer’s home. You provide the foster carer with some basic details — enough so that the carer can provide the best possible care for Sarah over the weekend.

**Complex, emotional, tough**
You head back to the service centre with your police partners, looking forward to being able to get into your own car and head home for the weekend. You make sure your notes are comprehensive and up-to-date so that you can complete the necessary paperwork on Monday and you are relieved that you did not need to apply for a temporary assessment order through the local magistrate — at least not this time.

**Accountable, focussed, responsible**
You have done some great work and you are exhausted, but you know that this is the beginning for Sarah and her family and that the real work with them will start on Monday.

**Professional, satisfying, important**
Child safety officers work with vulnerable children and families to ensure they have the supports they need to care safely for their children at home. When children have been harmed or may be at risk, child safety officers will work with the families to build on their strengths and ensure their children will be safe from further harm.

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**Is the child safety officer role for you?**

**Child focus**
Child safety officers need to know about children. They need to know how children grow and develop. They need to know about risk factors associated with abuse and neglect of children and the range of impacts children experience when they have been harmed or are at risk of harm within their family. Child safety officers also need to know the impacts children experience as a result of statutory intervention. They need a strong commitment to working positively with children and their families no matter how difficult the circumstances.

**Communication**
Child safety officers need to be able to modify their style to ensure communication is effective with the range of people they contact on a day-to-day basis. This can include children of all ages, colleagues, professionals, parents, and carers — all from a range of cultural backgrounds. Child safety officers need to be able to sensitively manage communication in difficult circumstances. They need to know what to ask, how to ask and who to ask in order to establish enough information to make thorough child safety assessments.

**Team orientation**
In an environment of competing priorities and complex demands, child safety officers need to know they can rely on their team. They support each other to make sure the job gets done and to build a work environment that is rewarding and rich.

**Statutory environment**
Child safety officers are responsible for working with children and families within the boundaries of departmental procedures and a range of relevant legislation, including the *Child Protection Act 1999*. This adds another layer to the way they, as professionals, work with children and their families.

In the complex world that is child protection this provides some structure to their work. Child safety officers use their skills and knowledge in relationship building, assessment, change management and intervention within the structure of the *Child Protection Act 1999*, to support children and strengthen families.
**Accountable**
Child safety officers make critical decisions about children and their families — decisions that must have their foundation in good case management and case work, decisions that are based on thorough assessments and are culturally appropriate.

These decisions and the processes used must be transparent — good documentation is vital.

**Professional**
Child safety officers know who they are and what they bring to the role and they know that they are constantly growing and learning in the role.

They are comfortable working autonomously but they also know the importance of consultation, professional development and reflecting on their practice. Child protection is complex and there is always something new to learn.

**The different teams in a child safety service centre**
Child safety service centres are structured to meet the varying demands in child protection work. As a child safety officer you could be expected to work in any team in a child safety service centre. Each team has a different purpose and focus. Child protection cases are allocated to particular teams based on the child protection plan developed for each child and their family. The duties you could expect to perform in each team are:

**Regional intake service**
You will receive information about child protection concerns. It will be your role to inform the person providing the information (notifier) about the role of Child Safety Services and other relevant service providers. You will be required to screen the information to decide the appropriate response. This may be referral to another government or non-government agency for early intervention and support or determining that an investigation and assessment is required when a child may be at risk of harm.

**Investigation and assessment**
In this team, you will investigate concerns received about harms and risk of harm. This involves assessing the child or young person’s immediate safety. This will usually involve conducting interviews with the child and family members to assess the level of future risk of harm. After this, you will determine whether a child is in need of protection and determine the appropriate type of ongoing intervention.

**Intervention with parental agreement**
You will work intensively with children, young people and their families to meet their protection and care needs while they remain in the family home for all or most of the intervention period. These cases are only used when parents are willing and able to actively work with the department to reduce the level of risk in the home.

**Alternative care (children under orders)**
In this team, you will work with children, young people, and their families (including foster carers) where children and young people are subject to either short-term or long-term child protection orders. This involves utilising case management skills to ensure the ongoing care needs of children and young people are met.

In addition there is also the:

**Placement services unit**
You will identify and process placements for all children and young people that require out-of-home care. As the placement services officer you will work collaboratively with child safety service centres to locate and secure out-of-home care placements.

**Kinship and foster care team**
You will plan, coordinate and participate in foster carer recruitment and retention activities. This involves planning, developing and implementing procedures for recruitment, screening, training and assessing of foster carer applicants. Your role is also to provide foster carers with training and resources.
Opportunities

There are many child safety service centres throughout Queensland offering a range of alternative work environments from the tropical north to the outback expanses.

Child safety officers have career opportunities in a range of leadership roles which include staff management, mentoring, training, practice development and policy development. Leadership roles can be based in service centres or in the corporate support areas — all focus on helping to ensure the ongoing safety of children in Queensland.

Careers in the department are built on a foundation of strong employment conditions and a range of professional pathways to suit your strengths and interests. In addition, a range of initiatives are in place to help child safety officers in their work. These initiatives include a comprehensive practice manual and a framework for child protection decision-making.

If you think a career in child safety is for you, apply to our continuous applicant pool at www.jobs.qld.gov.au (search for Department of Communities — child safety officer).

Our applicant guide contains details on the application process. If you require clarification about the child safety officer role and recruitment process, you can call 1800 089 515 to speak with a member of the recruitment team.

Contact

Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services
Human Resources and Ethical Standards
Employment Pathways — Child Safety Officer Recruitment Team
Freecall: 1800 089 515 *
Email: recruitmentteamhrb@communities.qld.gov.au

*Calls from mobile phones are charged at applicable rates.