



Partners in Care

Working better with foster and
kinship carers

October 2017

Minister's message



Queensland has more than 5000 foster and kinship carers and they are the lifeblood of our care system.

Without their commitment and dedication, we would be unable to provide quality care for some of Queensland's most vulnerable children.

That's why it is so important for us to take the time to hear from carers, find out from them what is working well, and the areas we need to focus our improvement efforts on.

I was proud to launch the Partners in Care engagement project at the 2017 Foster Care Queensland Conference. The workshops showcased the commitment of Queensland's carers to supporting the children in their care.

Since then, hundreds of carers have participated in workshops across the state and provided invaluable insight about how we can work better with carers and agencies to protect and nurture children in care.

Carers have told us the areas they want to see improved. Already, much has been done or is underway to address the issues and ideas raised by our carers to strengthen how we work together. However, there is much more to be done. We will do this - as partners in care - with carers and Foster Care Queensland and with foster and kinship care support agencies.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shannon Fentiman'.

Shannon Fentiman MP

Minister for Communities, Women and Youth

Minister for Child Safety and

Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence

Overview

Queensland's foster and kinship carers undertake one of the most important roles in our community — providing a safe, caring environment for children and young people and building their self-confidence to help them fulfil their potential. Without the support of our carers, we would be unable to provide quality care to Queensland children who are unable to live with their own parents.

We acknowledge the special partnership we share in keeping children safe and cared for, and we're committed to supporting our foster and kinship carers in their role as carers. To do this, we need to talk to our carers to understand what's working well and what parts of the foster care system could be better.

In partnership with Foster Care Queensland (FCQ), we launched Partners in Care — an engagement project to hear directly from foster and kinship carers about their experiences and ideas for improving the care system.

Between April and July 2017, we held 17 face-to-face workshops in 11 locations across Queensland. The workshop locations, selected in consultation with FCQ and based on the number of carers in the location, included:

- Cairns
- Mount Isa
- Townsville
- Mackay
- Rockhampton
- Maryborough
- North Coast
- Brisbane
- Logan
- Ipswich
- Gold Coast.

Who participated in the workshops

A total of 249 foster and kinship carers from a broad range of backgrounds participated in the workshops, and contributed 2558 years of collective experience as carers.

Staff from foster and kinship care service providers and our child safety service centre staff also attended.

Of the carers who participated in the workshops, 91 per cent felt the significance of their role was acknowledged and confident their views would be heard.

A small number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers participated in the workshops and provided valuable feedback on their experiences and expectations.

What we discussed

A range of discussion topics was prepared, focusing on key issues and priorities of foster and kinship carers identified through carer exit surveys and the 2016 biennial online survey of carers by FCQ. Carers were asked to select the topics to be discussed at each of the workshops. The top 6 discussion topics were:

1. Our relationship with foster and kinship carers
2. Information needed by carers to care for a child
3. Decision-making responsibilities
4. Being part of the child's care team
5. Supporting carers to meet the needs of children
6. Permanency for children in care

The workshops were designed to listen to carers' experiences with each of the discussion topics, and allow them to identify solutions to the key issues. Each workshop posed structured questions, such as 'what does "good" look like?', 'what is stopping us' and 'what are your ideas for change?'

249



FOSTER AND KINSHIP CARERS ATTENDED



90+ PER CENT

WORKSHOP SATISFACTION

SEVENTEEN

PARTNERS IN CARE WORKSHOPS

MOST REGULARLY REQUESTED WORKSHOP DISCUSSION TOPICS SELECTED BY CARERS:

- YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DEPARTMENT
- MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT THE CHILD IN YOUR CARE
- BEING PART OF THE CHILD CARE TEAM
- INFORMATION YOU NEED TO CARE FOR A CHILD
- PERMANENT PLACEMENT



2550+ YEARS

FOSTER AND KINSHIP CARER EXPERIENCE



424+

PARTICIPANTS

TOP THREE FEEDBACK COMMENTS FROM WORKSHOPS

“ **VERY WORTHWHILE SUGGESTIONS MADE** ”

“ **I FELT RESPECTED AND LISTENED TO** ”

“ **I HOPE ACTION AND CHANGE WILL NOW FOLLOW** ”

What we're doing now

The Partners in Care engagement workshops provided a valuable opportunity for us to hear directly from our carers about the care system, and understand the key issues and what 'good' looks like.

We've made much progress to improve the care system through the Queensland Government's *Supporting Families Changing Futures* reforms. However, we recognise there's still much more work to be done, including to strengthen our partnership with foster and kinship carers.

1. Our relationship with foster and kinship carers

Key issue

- Strengthening the quality of the relationship between carers and our child safety officers.

Our actions

We have:

- worked to restore child safety services by employing 130 more child safety officers than 2.5 years ago.
- established a new Quality Improvement Program to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our services. This will include capturing the views of carers and their relationship with child safety service centres (CSSCs).
- developed a staff training module Partners in Parenting to reinforce the importance of good working relationships, communication and planning with our carers.

We are now:

- employing an additional 300 child safety staff over the next 2 years including child safety officers and administration staff, to ease case loads and attract and retain more experienced staff.
- developing a training module for our staff *Working with our child protection partners*.
- providing 500 iPhones to our frontline staff to communicate more readily with young people and their care team.
- developing Safety and Support Network practice resources to support care teams.

We will:

- develop a Queensland Partners in Care Charter to replace the 2012 Statement of Commitment between the Queensland Government, carers and foster and kinship care service providers.
- undertake further targeted engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander foster and kinship carers to hear their views.
- work with foster and kinship care service providers to strengthen support for new carers during their first 12 months as carers, recognising the different needs of carers.
- use the new online Queensland Communities Hub and local Partners in Care forums to keep engaging with carers and their representatives.
- pilot the development of a traffic light system in two CSSCs to assist CSOs to respond to carers based on need.



2. Information needed by carers to care for a child

Key issue

- Time critical information is provided at time of placement and medical conditions and disabilities fully disclosed.
- Carers should be involved in the development of the Child Information Form and Authority to Care form, and receive these as soon as possible.
- Key information is made available from a central access point.
- Life stories are actively completed for all children.

Our actions

We have:

- converted the Child Information Form to an online format to make it easier for Child Safety Officers to update and provide to carers.

We are now:

- developing resources to inform carers about the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and to work with them to get the best possible support for children with disability in care.
- developing an online Qld Carer portal and mobile application for the secure sharing of information and for carers to access information and services, such as calendars, placement information and a child's medical information.

We will:

- revise carer training to better meet the needs of carers and the children in their care.
- enable carers to contribute to a child's life story via the kicbox application.

3. Decision-making responsibilities

Key issue

- Having clarity on who's responsible for making decisions about a child's support needs, and asking carers for their views about decisions to be made.
- Improving processes and ensuring carers are kept informed.

Our actions

We have:

- changed our policy to enable carers to take children for vaccinations and routine blood tests without needing our consent first.

We are now:

- reviewing how we can increase carers' autonomy in making decisions and simplify our decision making processes.

We will:

- delegate more day-to-day decisions to carers.
- delegate more day-to-day decisions and improve casework practices affecting carers.



4. Being part of the child's care team

Key issue

- Acknowledging the contribution carers can make to discussions about a child's care and support needs.

Our actions

We have:

- implemented a new Framework for Practice for our CSOs.
- developed tools to support a care team approach.

We are now:

- enhancing our practice to enable all members of the child's care team to be included and collaborate in meeting the needs of children in care.

We will:

- develop resources for carers and other people in the child's life to create a shared understanding of the care team approach.
- train managers, team leaders, practice leaders and CSOs and CSSOs in care team approaches.

5. Supporting carers to meet the needs of children

Key issues

- Supporting new carers in their role by providing information, knowledge and skills needed to enable them to properly care for children with a trauma experience.
- Understanding the different support and training needs of kinship carers, as well as the need for financial support.

Our actions

We have:

- improved financial support to carers through the early childhood education and care gap payment to help meet the costs of child care and kindergarten for children up to 5 years old.
- provided more than \$19M over 3 years to facilitate the transfer of recruitment, training and support services for foster and kinship carers to the non-government sector.
- made \$3M a year available to trial the Treatment Foster Care Oregon model, in South West Region over 2 years.
- increased the number of kinship carers by 13.5% over the last 2.5 years.



We are now:

- establishing a new kinship care program recognising the specific needs of kinship carers.
- developing guidelines for CSSCs to ensure a consistent and fair approach with financial assistance for carers of children with a NDIS plan.
- implementing arrangements to give carers priority access to Get Started Sporting vouchers to help children in care to join a sporting or active recreation club.
- develop specialist training for kinship carers in recognition of their unique training and support needs.
- partnering with Lady Cilento Children's Hospital to create Health Navigator positions to help carers and children in care better access health services.
- establishing new arrangements for comprehensive health assessments and regular health checks for all children coming into care.
- reviewing the availability of therapeutic services including our investment in the Evolve Program.
- rolling out the Kicbox mobile application for all young people in care across Queensland.

We will:

- work with FCQ to streamline processes for approval of the most common types of financial expenses incurred by carers.
- explore availability of more concessions, subsidies and discounts, and financial advice, that could help carers with cost of living pressures if required.
- establish Specialist Service Coordinator roles to support staff and carers to facilitate assessments, training and information and access other specialist services.
- develop specialist training in trauma-informed care and dealing with challenging behaviors.
- advocate to the Australian Government for better access for carers to Medicare, Centrelink and child care benefits.

6. Permanency for children in care

Key issue

- Focusing on the child's needs must be the priority when making decisions about their long-term care.

Our actions

We have:

- increased the number of long term carer guardians by 8.4% over the last 2.5 years.
- undertaken extensive public consultation over the past 2 years on the role and purpose of Queensland's child protection laws to improve opportunities and life outcomes for children, young people and their families who are in contact with the child protection system.

We have also introduced the Child Protection Reform Amendment Bill 2017 into the Queensland Parliament proposing major changes to the *Child Protection Act 1999*, including to enable greater permanency and stability for children who come into care. These include:

- new permanency principles.
- a hierarchy of orders.
- time limits on consecutive short term orders unless in the child's best interests.
- a new Permanent Care Order.

We will:

- implement these legislative changes, once passed, through our policies and practice to keep children safe, cared for and supported to reach their full potential.
- continue to provide financial support to long term carers regardless of their guardianship status.
- enable long term carers to exercise guardian decision making wherever possible.

What we will do

Over the next few months, we will share the Partners in Care final report with carers, staff and foster and kinship care support agencies.

We will engage with them to further consider the issues and ideas and identify what else can be done, including by the support agencies.

Regional action plans will be developed to address the immediate issues specific to each location.

Further engagement will be held with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander foster and kinship carers.

We are committed to significantly improving our day to day relationship with carers. Over the next couple of months this will see the introduction of:

- common carer service standards across all CSSCs.
- a dedicated foster and kinship carer contact point in each CSSC.
- more on the ground support for CSOs organising financial assistance and other supports for care.
- improvements in casework practices involving or affecting care.

Specific actions will be detailed in regional action plans which will be provided to you when finalised.

We will be engaging with foster and kinship care agencies and asking them to commit to actions in response to feedback from Partners in Care.

We will ask agencies to work with us and FCQ to refresh the Statement of Commitment between the Queensland Government, carers and foster and kinship care service providers to establish a Queensland Partners in Care Charter.

We will hold meetings with carers including FCQ FAST representatives and foster and kinship care agencies at least once every 6 months to ensure we hear from carers about whether our actions are having the right impact.

We're also committed to implementing the recommendations of the Queensland Family and Child Commission in their report *Keeping Queensland's children more than safe: review of the foster care system*. This includes how we improve assessments and tailor training for foster carers and kinship carers, and clarify roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in protecting and caring for children.

Changes to our policies and practice will be implemented through a phased approach over the next 18 months. We will continue engaging carers in a genuine and meaningful way to improve their experiences with the care system.

Partners in care will be an ongoing engagement between the department, carers and foster and kinship care agencies. Action plans will continue to evolve and changes will be implemented in a way that ensures they can be sustained.

For more information go to qld.gov.au/PartnersInCare



Actions at a glance

System level

Completed

- Employed 130 more CSOs than 2.5 years ago.
- Established a new Quality Improvement Program that will capture the views of carers and their relationship with child safety service centres.
- Changed our policy to enable carers to take children for vaccinations and routine blood tests and provide carers with improved access to Medicare cards.
- Improved financial support to carers through the early childhood education and care gap payment to help meet the costs of child care and kindergarten for children up to 5 years old.
- Provided more than \$19M over 3 years to facilitate the transfer of recruitment, training and support services for foster and kinship carers to the non-government sector.
- Made \$3M a year available to trial the Treatment Foster Care Oregon model in South West Region over 2 years.
- increased the number of long term carer guardians by 8.4% over the last 2.5 years
- Increased the number of kinship carers by 13.5% over the last 2.5 years.
- Undertook extensive public consultation over the past 2 years on the role and purpose of Queensland's child protection laws to improve opportunities and life outcomes for children, young people and their families who are in contact with the child protection system.
- Developed a staff training module *Partners in Parenting*.



Underway or planned	<p>Our relationship with foster and kinship carers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employing 300 additional frontline staff including CSOs and administration staff over the next 2 years to ease case loads and attract and retain more experienced staff. • Developing <i>Working with our child protection partners</i> training module for staff and make further improvements to training informed by Partners in Care. • Providing 500 iPhones to frontline staff to improve accessibility. • Developing Safety and Support Network practice resources. • Work with foster and kinship care service providers to strengthen support for new carers during their first 12 months as carers. • Review the Statement of Commitment between the Queensland Government, carers and foster and kinship care service providers to establish a Queensland Partners in Care Charter. <p>Information needed by carers to care for a child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing Carer Connect app for carers to access information and services. • Developing carer resources to inform carers about the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). • Enable carers to contribute to a child’s life story via the kicbox application • Revise carer training to address issues raised during Partners in Care to better meet the needs of carers and the children in their care. <p>Decision making responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review how we can increase carers’ autonomy in making decisions and simplify our decision making processes. • Delegate more day-to-day decisions to carers. <p>Being part of the child’s care team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing our practice to enable all members of the child’s care team to be included and collaborate in meeting the needs of children in care. • Develop resources for carers and other people in the child’s life to create a shared understanding of the care team approach. • Train managers, team leaders, practice leaders and CSOs and CSSOs in care team approaches.
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Supporting carers to meet the needs of children

- Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander foster and kinship carers to better understand the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers and children.
- Establishing a new kinship care program and develop specialist training for kinship carers.
- Work with FCQ to streamline processes for approval of the most common types of financial expenses incurred by carers.
- Developing guidelines for child safety service centres to ensure a consistent and fair approach with financial assistance for carers of children with an NDIS plan.
- Implementing arrangements to give carers priority access to Get Started Sporting vouchers to help children in care to join a sporting or active recreation club.
- Explore availability of concessions, subsidies and discounts, and financial advice, that could help carers with cost of living pressures, if required.
- Partnering with Lady Cilento Children's Hospital to create e-Health Navigator positions to help carers and children in care better access health services.
- Establishing a new health assessment model for all children coming into care.
- Reviewing availability of therapeutic services including our investment in the Evolve Program.
- Rolling out the Kicbox mobile application for all young people in care across Queensland.
- Establish Specialist Service Coordinator roles to support staff and carers to facilitate assessments, training and information and access other specialist services.
- Develop specialist training in trauma-informed care and dealing with challenging behaviours.
- Advocate to the Australian Government for better access for carers to Medicare, Centrelink and child care benefits.

Permanency for children in care

- Introduction of the Child Protection Reform Amendment Bill 2017 proposing changes to support permanency and stability for children who come into care.
- Continue to provide financial support to long term carers regardless of their guardianship status.
- Enable long term carers to exercise guardian decision-making, wherever possible.

Regional level

Underway or planned	<p>Our relationship with foster and kinship carers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review our practice to ensure all members of the child’s care team are included and collaborate in meeting the needs of children.• Detail other specific actions in regional action plans to be shared with carers.• Engage with foster and kinship care agencies and ask them to commit to actions in response to feedback from Partners in Care.• Hold meetings with carers including FCQ FAST representatives and foster and kinship care agencies at least once every 6 months to ensure we hear from carers about whether our actions are having the right impact. <p>Supporting carers to meet the needs of children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide more on the ground support for CSOs organising financial assistance and other supports for carers. <p>Decision making responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Simplify our decision making processes.
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Local level

Underway or planned	<p>Our relationship with foster and kinship carers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve casework practices involving or affecting carers.• Use the Partners in Care engagement report to support CSO supervision• Introduction of common carer service standards across all CSSCs.• Introduction of a dedicated foster and kinship carer contact point in each CSSC.• Pilot the development of a traffic light system in two CSSCs to assist CSOs to respond to carers based on need.
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