



kids' issues

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Commission's role in child protection strengthened

The CMC inquiry into the abuse of children in foster care has recommended a further strengthening of the Commission for Children and Young People's powers to protect Queensland's children and young people in care.

The report recommended a new statutory position of Child Guardian be created within the Commission for Children and Young People.

The report also recommended the extension of the Commission's Community Visitor program to ensure visits are made to all children in alternative care. This would now include children in foster care, who are not currently visited.

In addition, the CMC has recommended the expansion of the Commission's role in dealing with child deaths.

Commissioner for Children and Young People, Robin Sullivan, complimented the CMC for its unambiguous focus on meeting the needs of Queensland's most vulnerable children.

"The new powers would increase support for and the accountability of all involved in the child protection system in Queensland," she said.

"These mechanisms are essential if we are to ensure the wellbeing of children in the alternative care system.

"The Commission has pushed for greater powers to oversee the welfare of children in care, and this report vindicates our stance."

>> For the Government's response to the independent audit into foster care records, see page 3.

Channel 10 takes award for best children or young person's story

The Commission recently sponsored a category in the Queensland Media Awards for the best coverage of children's or young people's issues.

Commissioner for Children and Young People, Robin Sullivan, said the Commission's involvement is important, as it encourages responsible reporting of children and young people's issues.

"Children and young people are often viewed negatively by the media, so we hope awards like this will encourage journalists to pursue more positive stories," Dr Sullivan said.

Channel Ten won the award for a story about Schoolies Week.

The other finalists were Rosalind Pulley of the Cairns Post and Nadia Farha of ABC Online.



Commissioner for Children and Young People Robin Sullivan presents the award for the Best Coverage of Children and Young People's Issues to Helen Wright of the Ten News team

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Commission for
Children & Young People
Queensland Government



Commissioner's column

As individuals, we often start the New Year with a list of improvements we want to make in our lives. These changes are often the result of bad habits we have developed over the years, and the changes are often long overdue.

In the same way, 2004 promises to be a year of major transformation for Queensland's child protection system.

The system has been the subject of intense scrutiny over many years, culminating in the Crime and Misconduct Commission's Inquiry into the Abuse of Children in Foster Care report.

As the articles on pages 1 and 3 show, a number of reports released recently have led to the Commission for Children and Young People being granted additional and stronger powers.

These include the Ombudsman's report into the death of baby Kate; the independent audit into foster care records and most recently, the Crime and Misconduct Commission's Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Foster Care.

You may be aware I am a member of the Implementation Committee, overseeing the development of the new Department of Child Safety. We are making significant progress in shaping the future of our child protection system.

Clearly, the Commission is in a stronger position than ever to ensure Queensland's most vulnerable children are looked after. The community can be confident the Commission will be vigilant and conscientious in independently monitoring the wellbeing of at risk children in Queensland.

But to ensure child safety, everyone in the community must commit to ensuring there is no recurrence of the issues which sparked the CMC Inquiry.

In 2004, let's all resolve to make child protection everyone's business.

Robin Sullivan

Commissioner for Children and Young People

Advocacy workshops kick off

The Commission's Advocacy Workshops have kicked off around the state, with sessions already held on the Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba, the Gold Coast and Hervey Bay.

The workshops aim to help participants understand how to advocate on behalf of children and young people, different kinds of advocacy and to provide contacts for organisations that can help young people.

Commissioner for Children and Young People, Robin Sullivan, said early feedback from participants has been positive.

"The Commission works very hard to improve the community's understanding of the needs of children and young people," she said.

"These workshops are yet another way for the Commission to share information with the community about the best way to speak up on behalf of children and young people."

Workshop participants receive a resource folder, Useful Contacts for Children and Young People, which contains information on organisations which advocate in areas including health, education, youth justice, employment and training and housing.

The workshops also provide a valuable opportunity for participants to network with people from a variety of other agencies.

Anyone interested in attending a workshop should contact Tania Hill or Trish Hayes on 07 3247 5525.



Kidspeak



My name is Selina Woodfield. I am 15 years old and I have lived in Longreach, QLD all of my life. This past year I have become an active member of the community to get the most out of being here in rural QLD.

At my school, Longreach State High, I have been involved of the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge and the "I am Australian" musical. I am also on the Longreach State High's girls' soccer team and earlier this year we traveled to Mt Isa for a tournament. It was a great experience.

I have done voluntary door knocking for the Red Cross and the Leukaemia Foundation. I have also done some voluntary waitressing for the Variety Club Bash held in Longreach in August, the Big Night Out held in September to raise money for local children, and the benefit dinner held for Neil Johnston the tri-athlete.

The highlight of my year was definitely taking part in the B*SASSY program in July. The aim of the program was to encourage rural girls to Be Smart Articulate Successful Senioritas Yeah. It was presented by the Longreach Branch of the Queensland Rural Women's Network and gave young country women the chance to learn about teamwork, make-up and deportment, money management, successful goal setting, relationships and most importantly, about themselves. It was a different learning environment from school and a lot more fun.

Girls from Longreach, Aramac, Blackall, Barcaldine and Winton attended the B*SASSY program and everyone enjoyed it. After a day of learning a dinner was held to end to day. It was a fantastic day with lots of new friendships being made.

Last year was a great one for me and I am hoping that this year will be just as good.

Selina Woodfield

Commissioner welcomes new powers

In December, Premier Peter Beattie announced greater powers would be granted to the Commission for Children and Young People through changes to the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 2000*.

The announcement followed the release of an external audit of Department of Families foster care records and the Commissioner's call for stronger systemic monitoring powers before the CMC Inquiry into abuse of children in foster care.

Audit recommendations included changes allowing the Commission to oversee case plans and to access data concerning children and young people in alternative care.

Commissioner for Children and Young People, Robin Sullivan, said the additional powers and funding would enhance the Commission's role in fighting child abuse.

"I'm also pleased to see the Premier has announced an increase in funding for the other key players in child protection – the Department of Families, the non-government sector and foster carers," she said.

"Those who come into contact with the child protection system are among the most vulnerable in society - we must ensure the state is accountable for providing these children with the best possible care."

Focus on Fathering - available now

Edited by the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Dr Robin Sullivan, *Focus on Fathering* is a new publication which discusses the roles in which Australian men find themselves as fathers.

Focus on Fathering can be purchased for \$29.95, and is available through the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER). For more information, contact ACER on 1800 338 402 or order online at www.acerpress.com.au

Children's Week 2003

The Commission continued to play an active role in Children's Week, again taking part in a range of events during the celebration.

As State Patron of Children's Week, Commissioner for Children and Young People Robin Sullivan was personally involved in several activities during the week.

The Commissioner hosted school groups at a special screening of the film 'Holes', a Disney film based on the bestselling novel by Louis Sachar.

Dr Sullivan also hosted an online chat through the GENERATE web site, and spoke with children and young people from around Queensland.

"The web chat gave me the chance to talk to participants about their rights – what rights they think they should have and any situations they've experienced where they don't feel they were given any rights," Dr Sullivan said.

Several young people took part in the web chat, and spoke to the Commissioner about topics ranging from Schoolies Week and education to corporate sponsorship and children acting as carers for parents.

"I also had the opportunity to hear about some great local projects initiated by young people around the state," she said.

The week was launched at Underwater World on the Sunshine Coast by Children's Week State Ambassador and former Olympic swimmer Samantha Riley.

Other activities during Children's Week included open days, art displays, picnics and activities at schools and playgroups across the state.

The Commissioner said it was not too early to start planning events for Children's Week 2004.

"I encourage everyone to either take part in Children's Week activities or initiate events of their own."



Children's Week State Ambassador Sam Riley receives a sloppy kiss from Teiko at the launch of Children's Week at Underwater World.

For more information about getting involved in Children's Week 2004, contact the Queensland Children's Week Association on email: info@childrensweek.com.au

Performance stats

1 October – 31 December 2003

Community Visitors carried out 377 visits across around 200 sites during the quarter. Of those visits, 275 were conducted outside Brisbane.

The program welcomed two new Community Visitors in the quarter, with Tracy Marshall (Gladstone) and Mary Wallace (Townsville) commencing visits in their local areas.

Complaints and Investigations enjoyed their first full quarter with a newly implemented database system. During the quarter, 728 complaints enquiries were received, including phone contacts, faxes, emails and letters. Eighty-four cases were progressed, with 80 per cent of those cases originating outside Brisbane.

Employment Screening Services experienced another busy quarter in the lead-up to Christmas, receiving 24,592 applications for blue cards and issuing 26,222 suitability notices. Seventy-six withdrawn applications resulted from challenges by the Commission.

calendar of events

13 February – Tatts and Tiaras Day for the Abused Child Trust. For more information phone 3857 8866 or go to www.tattsandtiaras.com.au

22-29 March – "Buy a Butterfly" for the Hear and Say Centre for Deaf Children. For more information phone 3870 2221 or 3870 3998

27 March-4 April – National Youth Week. For more information go to www.generate.qld.gov.au