



kids issues

Edition 8
Summer 2002

Commissioner's Comment

There is no doubt that children's issues have finally gained top priority in national politics, policies and the media. The Commission for Children and Young People is participating in these debates in a number of ways and has made the following contributions.

Refugee children and young people

As the Commissioner for Children and Young People, I have a particular responsibility to prioritise the needs and interests of vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Due to the circumstances of their arrival in Australia and previous experiences, refugee children and young people certainly fit into this category.

On 5 February 2002, I convened a forum to discuss matters affecting refugee children and young people. The forum was attended by around 25 representatives of community organisations which provide services and support to refugees.

Access to education, health services, accommodation, transport and racism were issues raised. Groups affected include Permanent Protection Visa holders, Temporary Protection Visa holders and asylum-seekers.

The Commission is following up many of these issues and I am committed to advocating at the state level for the rights, interests and well-being of refugee children and young people, especially on their access to state government services.

Following my appointment as an Expert Assistant Commissioner to the National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention, the Commission will also be able to advocate for refugee children and

young people at the national level.

The inquiry is being convened by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC). It will consider the

Our legislative functions in this area focus on protecting and promoting the well-being of children and young people now and in the future.

Prof. Ian O'Connor, Chair, Forde Inquiry Implementation Monitoring Committee, presented his final report to Parliament on the implementation of the 1997 Forde Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions. In it, he suggested an extension of the Commission's legislation.

In particular, he has suggested the expansion of complaints and investigative powers to cover all children, adding domestic violence shelters, student hostels and foster homes caring for large numbers of children to visitable sites for Community Visitors.

Government and non-government agency consultation on these matters is underway, and I thank all those who have contributed.

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Kidspeak - Coast FM
Children and young people in Queensland: a snapshot

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Commission for
Children & Young People



Commissioner s Comment continued

'Working with Children Check'

The rollout of the 'Working with Children Check' continues as a significant contribution to child protection.

Screening for new prospective employees started on 1 May 2001, and screening of self-employed people has been mandatory since 1 February 2002.

Volunteer screening starts on 1 May 2002, when voluntary workers will have to complete an application form consenting to a 'Working with Children Check'.

Applications for volunteers will be processed free of charge.

The 'Working with Children Check' covers people who work with children in:

- out of home residential facilities providing accommodation
- school boarding facilities
- schools and community groups (i.e. churches, clubs and associations) which provide services for children or which conduct activities involving children
- child counselling and support services, and
- private teaching, coaching or tutoring on a commercial basis.

Volunteers under 18 years of age are not subject to the 'Working with Children Check'.

Also exempted are parent volunteers who provide services for and assistance with activities at a school or in a church group, club or association in which their child is enrolled or a participant.

To be eligible for screening, volunteers must have the following levels of contact:

- at least once a week over one month
- at least once a fortnight over two months, or
- at least once a month over six months.

Volunteers involved in short-term or one-off work are not required to apply for a check.

Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Act 2001

A further child protection initiative the Commission for Children and Young People has been involved in is the new Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Act 2001.

This Act requires all Board members of non-government schools to undergo a 'Working with Children Check' through the Commission.

An integral part by schools of the accreditation process is the development of child protection





New Executive Director

policies and practices which are independently assessed every five years.

I will offer the board overseeing this process (the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board) the Commission's assistance in supporting the development of such policies and practices.

I have also initiated contact with church leaders to offer the Commission's expertise to help develop policies and practices on appropriate ways of responding to allegations of child abuse.

While further work in this area is necessary, I hope to establish a line of communication with the churches to work together to protect children from harm.

I believe these initiatives indicate a community willingness to accept additional legislative and policy changes to strengthen the protection of our children from harm.

However, we cannot abrogate our individual responsibilities and contributions. As the slogan on the *Working with Children Check* "blue" card reminds us: "Child protection is everybody's business."



Early in this quarter, Barry Salmon was appointed to the Commission as Executive Director. In this position Barry is responsible for Employment Screening, Community Visitors and Complaints and the Investigations functions

of the Commission.

Before taking up his duties at the Commission, Barry was Assistant Director of the Queensland School Curriculum Council and managed the Pre-school to Year 10 curriculum development program.

He brings with him over 25 years of practical experience in supporting young people, teachers and administrators in Queensland schools.

Barry was instrumental in establishing an early intervention process for Queensland children in relation to literacy and numeracy and introducing an outcomes-based curriculum for Queensland schools.

Barry's position at the Commission aims to support the rights of children and young people and look after their interests. He is strongly committed to the view that strengthening the



Between 1 October and 31 December 2002 the Commission achieved a range of outcomes.

Complaint and Investigations

The Complaints and Investigation Unit received 831 telephone calls on complaints and related case work matters. 65 calls were about children's matters, while 65 were about operational or administrative matters.

45 complaint letters were sent to service providers, three matters referred to the Crime and Misconduct Commission and 15 matters referred to the Queensland Police Service. 84 letters were sent to complainants about action taken or related matters. Four project letters and four letters on operational/administrative matters were also forwarded. There were 57 reminders on overdue correspondence.

72 written replies were received about action taken on written complaints and other concerns of children and young people. Complaints and Investigations Unit staff were involved in 14 presentations/functions or meetings on the Commission's work.

Employment Screening

The Employment Screening Services Unit received 2859 applications - 2344 from prospective paid employees and 515 from people involved in child related businesses.

2705 suitability cards were issued and three negative notices were issued declaring people unsuitable for child-related employment. 16 people withdrew from the employment screening process.

In this period, officers from the Unit were involved in 10 presentations, functions or meetings on the implementation of employment screening.

Policy

The Commission made 12 submissions in response to legislative or policy proposals and reviews. They related to education, children's participation in charitable organisations, child sexual abuse, family and work and whole-of-government priorities.

The Commission was represented on three whole-of-government committees and reference groups on the high incidence of teenage pregnancies, the needs of children of women in custody and legislation on the adoption of children.

The Commission also submitted suggestions from indigenous school children from Pormpuraaw, Yarrabah and Mapoon State Schools to the Cape York Justice Study.

The Commission noted that around 47 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Queensland are under 18 years old. As such, this group is a key stakeholder in any study or review on indigenous communities in Queensland.

It is hoped the study's recommendations will be informed by the practical suggestions offered by children taking part in consultations with the Commission.

Between October and December, work also started on assessing the extent of volatile substance abuse among children and young people in Queensland. The outcome of this work is expected to be made available in the next newsletter.

Community Visitors

The Community Visitors program is running well. In this quarter, 22 Community Visitors across the state visited locations for young people in out of home residential care. Replacement Community Visitors have been appointed to Gladstone, the Sunshine Coast and to two Brisbane positions. There are now two Community Visitors to share visits to the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre.

The Community Visitors met for three days of training in October. The training included a day on cultural awareness when working with young people from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities. Community Visitors also had the opportunity to share some their experiences, and to discuss how to deal with different situations as they arise.

Community Visitors have met many young people in the course of their work, many of whom are happy with the way they are being looked after. Where young people are unhappy, Community Visitors have generally been able to help resolve the issues. This has often been achieved by working with those who look after young people or with the government department responsible for the service.

There are currently 120 sites across the state visited each month. These include crisis accommodation shelters, family group homes residential services, SAAP services for homeless young people, respite centres for children and young people with disabilities and youth detention centres. In this quarter, Community Visitors made 230 visits - 161 outside Brisbane.

Calendar of Events

Dr Daniel Keating

CCYP is to host seminar featuring Professor and Chair of the Department of Human Development and Applied Psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto - 8 May 2002.

Youth Week
7-14 April 2002

Under 8's Week
24-31 May 2002

National Child Protection Week
1 - 7 September