



kids' issues

Edition 9 • July 2002.

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Working with Children Check for volunteers



On May 1, Queensland's Commission for Children and Young People became the first organisation in Australia to run criminal history checks on volunteers working with children and young people.

Since then, Queensland volunteers must be able to present a blue suitability card indicating they have passed the Working with Children Check before they can work in child-related employment.

Commissioner, Robin Sullivan, said the check is a comprehensive screening of applicant's criminal history required under the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 2000*.

Under the Act, all new paid employees working with young people have been required to undergo the check since 1 May 2001, and self-employed people have been screened since 1 February this year.

"The introduction of this final phase of employment screening means Queensland now has a significant child protection strategy designed to deter unsuitable people from working with

children," Dr Sullivan said.

"I believe this legislation will provide peace of mind for everyone, with children's best interests at heart."

It is estimated that about 100,000 volunteers in the State who work with children will be screened, including volunteers in churches, schools, youth groups and sports clubs.

Commission hosts international expert

In May, the Commission for Children and Young People hosted a seminar by a world leader in childhood development research, Dr Daniel Keating.

Dr Keating is Professor and Chair of the Department of Human Development in Applied Psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto in Canada.

Commissioner, Robin Sullivan, said Dr Keating looks at how our social environments shape the way we think, and how social institutions must change to work effectively with increasingly diverse populations.

"He canvassed the links between social and economic status and how they affect health and academic achievement, or children's 'developmental health'," she said.

"He's found these links stay with children as they mature, and will affect them throughout their lives."

Dr Sullivan said Dr Keating is one of the most respected experts in the world in this area.

"My role as Commissioner demands that I do my utmost to support children and young people in Queensland.

"I believe Dr Keating's research provides a vital link in our understanding of childhood development so we can strive for the best possible outcomes for potentially disadvantaged children."

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Commission for
Children & Young People
Queensland Government

Commissioner's Comment

I am continuously being challenged to look at more creative ways of improving children and young people's participation in decision-making on issues affecting them.

Last year, the Commission ensured they were heard in our submission to the Cape York Justice Study headed by Justice Tony Fitzgerald.

We wanted our submission to include the views of young people on the Cape - particularly as around 50% living in Indigenous communities are under 18.

We liaised with school principals in Cape York, who consulted students on our behalf, so students were comfortable expressing their views.

Students were asked:

- What do you like about living in your community?
- What are the biggest problems on your community?
- What could the Government do to solve these problems?
- What could adults on the community do?
- What could you do to help?
- What should be done to make your community safe and happy for children?

We received a wealth of practical solutions to some of the problems facing their communities.

Their comments appeared in full in the final report, and their solutions were reflected in its recommendations and the Government's response.

The schools involved received follow-up information about the Government's response, so the children could see how their views informed government decisions on issues concerning them.

This was the first time children and young people have been consulted about problems in remote Indigenous communities in Queensland. We hope it will set an example for the way in which consultation is conducted in future studies of this type.

Robin Sullivan

Commissioner for Children and Young People

Blueprint Launch



The official launch of the Blueprint for a Child and Youth Friendly Commonwealth at Hands on Art, South Bank 24 May 2002. The Blueprint is available online at: www.childcomm.qld.gov.au/publications/CCYP_dare_to_care_brochure.pdf

Children and Young People in Queensland: A Snapshot

The Commission for Children and Young People has released its Snapshot of Children and Young People in Queensland.

The report aims to identify and provide information which can contribute to agencies' understanding of issues which impact on the rights, interests and well being of children and young people in this state.

Report co-ordinator, Emma Ogilvie, said the document provides a 'first step' in profiling children and young people in Queensland using health, education, victimisation and criminality measures.

"The report will be a useful resource for those interested in the welfare of our young people," she said.

"It aims to highlight available data that can provide useful indications of their levels of well-being."

The Snapshot report is available on the Commission's website at www.childcomm.qld.gov.au

Kidspeak

Gold Coast student wins national Haiku Competition

Jessica Kale, a 12-year-old student at St Michael's College at Carrarra, recently won World Children's Haiku Contest sponsored by Japan Airlines.

Where did it all begin?

We were in our Japanese class when our teacher told us about the competition. When we found out what the prize was (a trip to Japan for a week which is fully paid for and is sponsored by JAL) I decided to enter.

We had to write about something from our country.

Some of the people in my class wrote about the gum trees and the kangaroos but I decided to write about the beaches at night time when the moon reflects on the waves as it is really peaceful.

A haiku is a 17 syllable, three line verse. This is my haiku: Shadows On The Sea,
Shimmers In The Gentle Waves,
Reflecting Moonlight.

When told of my win, I was shocked, and then I cried!

Two of the other people from my school got a high distinction: Holly Fleet in Year 9 and Laura Hansford in Year 8.

We are all very proud of our efforts and the school can't wait to see the photos of Japan when I get back.

All who won and who got a high distinction, will have their haikus published in a book which will be printed in different languages.

Naturally, I am really excited, and I leave on 25 July to meet and stay with 19 others from the Asia-Pacific Region, who won the competition in their country.

Join our electronic mailing list...

If you would like to receive this newsletter electronically in future, please contact Bianca Hill on phone 3239 6743.

Improving conditions for refugee children

In recent months, the Commission for Children and Young People has made inroads into improving conditions for refugee children and young people.

Commissioner, Robin Sullivan, said the Commission has become a member of the Interdepartmental Committee on Multicultural Affairs, convened by Multicultural Affairs Queensland (MAQ).

"This will allow us to advocate to improve government services to young refugees," Dr Sullivan said.

"The Commission has also won a commitment by the Minister for Education to review current charges to asylum seekers to attend government schools."

In addition, the Commissioner has requested a meeting with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs on a number of issues.

"It's difficult to arrange medical and dental treatment for refugee children because of problems accessing health records, and I'm concerned about their lack of Medicare entitlements."

"Other issues include the limited funding available for the Program for Refugee Minors without Parents in Australia, and the need to provide more flexible, family-friendly English classes to adult refugees."

The Commissioner has arranged to meet a group of young refugees in July to hear first hand of any difficulties they have had in accessing services.



(from l to r): Amy Penfold, School Captain Janine Munro, with Martin Relstab and Commissioner, Dr Robin Sullivan.

Commission welcomes US student

Andrea Freedman, a law student from the United States, is currently working with the Commission to learn how Queensland takes care of its children and young people.

Andrea attends law school at Suffolk Law School in Boston, concentrating on juvenile law.

She said her experiences in law school have solidified her desire to defend children, but she's frustrated with the way the US juvenile justice system treats the children that come before it.

"My time in Australia with the Commission for Children and Young People has been very enlightening," Andrea said.

"I look forward to learning even more in upcoming weeks and taking some good ideas back with me when I return home."

Performance

Employment Screening still flat strap

Employment Screening Unit Manager, Michelle Miller, said the flow of applications for a Working with Children Check has continued unabated, with 48,770 applications received in the three months to 30 June 2002.

Of these, 40,000 applications were from volunteers, 6,764 applications were from prospective paid employees and 2,006 from people carrying on a regulated child related business.

"The figures really illustrate the success of the Commission's advertising campaign in alerting volunteers who work with children to the need to undergo employment screening," Ms Miller said.

8,639 suitability cards were issued in the quarter.

Complaints and Investigations down on pre-Christmas figures

In the three months to 30 June, 2002, the Commission's Complaints and Investigations Unit received 432 telephone complaints and related case work matters. Of these, 135 calls were about other children's matters.

Unit Manager, Anthony Benedetti, said the drop in complaints this quarter, compared to the December quarter figure of 831 calls, is a welcome relief.

Mr Benedetti said as a result of complaints received, 36 letters of complaint were sent to service providers, four matters referred to the Crime and Misconduct Commission and 15 letters sent to the Queensland Police Service and two referrals were made to the Ombudsman and to Education Queensland.

The Community Visitors program continues to grow

In the June quarter, 23 Community Visitors across the state made 337 visits to young people in out of home residential care across the state. Of these, 258 were outside Brisbane.

In this period, the program began visiting mental health facilities set up to meet the needs of children or adolescents, or which cater for young people from time to time. Some additional respite facilities that accommodate young people have also been identified and included in visits.

Program Manager, Dennis Palmer, said Community Visitors continue to build up their networks in their areas, identifying other services in their areas that need to be visited.

There are now 163 sites across the state visited each month.

In the June quarter, a new Community Visitor was appointed in Toowoomba.

calendar of events

Issues Paper Launch

1 August 2002, Customs House 4.30 - 6.00 pm

19 - 27 October 2002, Children's Week