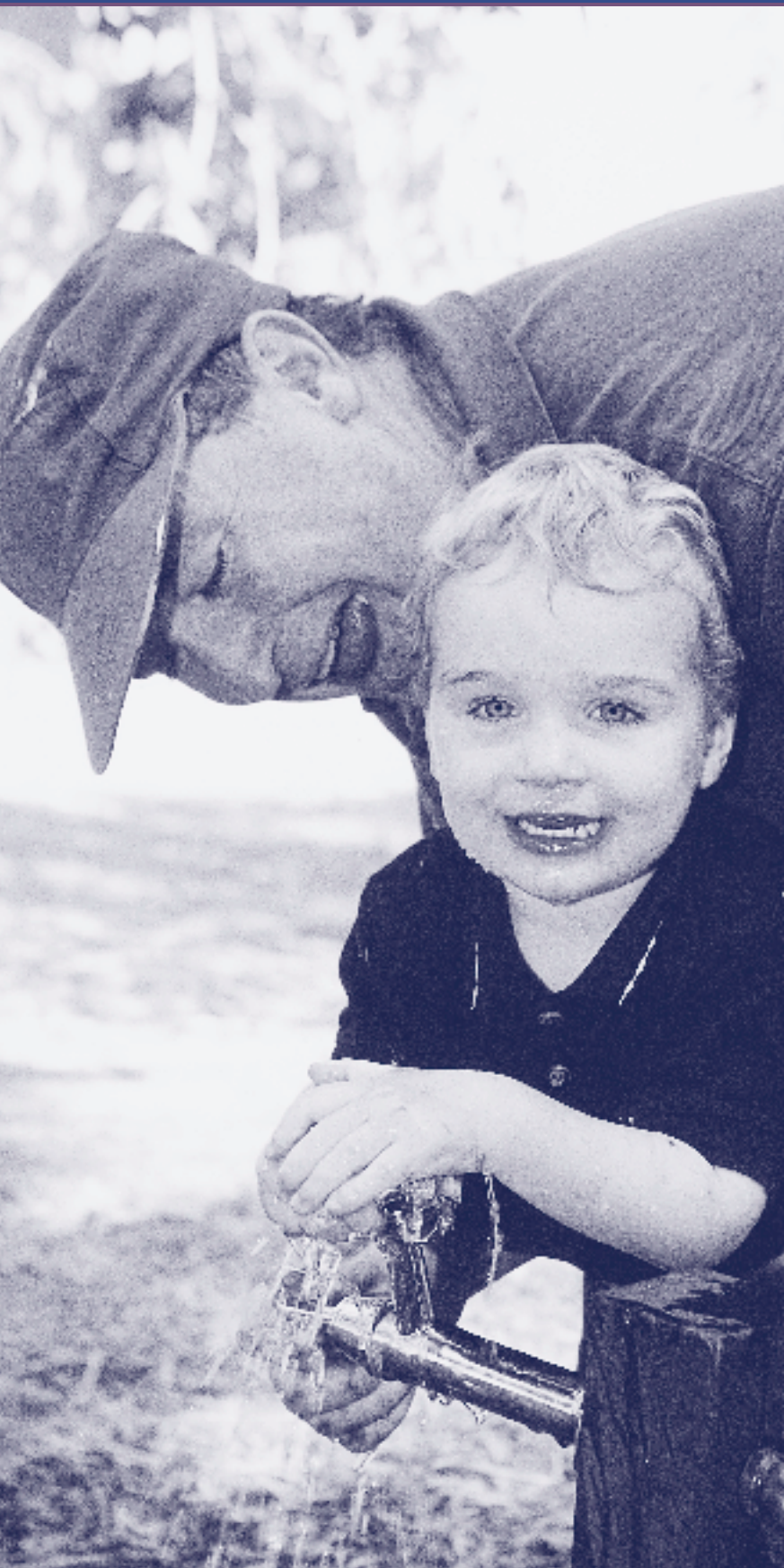


# ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITY - *Complaints and Investigations*



## **KEY FUNCTIONS**

The Complaints and Investigation Unit monitors, investigates and seeks to resolve complaints about services provided to children by government and non-government service providers. The Unit consists of two staff and a casual locum. These officers respond on a daily basis to distressed children or clients who have concerns about children. They are conscious of the importance of their role, and strive to treat every case as they would if the child was their own.

## **HIGHLIGHTS**

Staff progressed 424 case files this financial year.

Assessments of complaints received were completed within a month in 100% of cases.

Follow up action within the month resulted in 99.5% of cases.

On average, 85% of cases started in one quarter were closed by the following quarter.

## **OUTCOMES AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

In the financial year 1 July 2001 to 30 June 2002, the Unit received 2,676 telephone calls of complaint or expressions of concern for children and young people. This represented a rise in the number of calls of nearly 12% compared with

*The staff are conscious of the importance of their role and strive to treat every case as they would if the child was their own.*

the previous financial year. In every case, the Complaints and Investigations Officers provided immediate information and advice to help resolve the callers' concerns. Where appropriate, attempts were made to encourage the complainant to resolve their concerns locally with the service provider.

When responding to complaints, the Commissioner formally corresponds with service providers and relevant authorities. Last financial year, 168 matters were referred to the Department of Families, 55 to the Queensland Police Service, two to Disability Services Queensland and four to Queensland Health. In addition, 12 matters were referred to the Crime and Misconduct Commission, four matters to Education Queensland and three matters were forwarded to the Ombudsman.

The Complaints and Investigations Unit contributed to the wellbeing of children and young people in Queensland by conducting presentations to Department of Families Complaints Officers and Family Services Officers about complaints management. The staff also made a series of visits to regional Queensland during the 2001-2002 financial year to promote the complaints and investigations process and provide people in regional areas with an opportunity to talk to a Complaints Officer face-to-face.

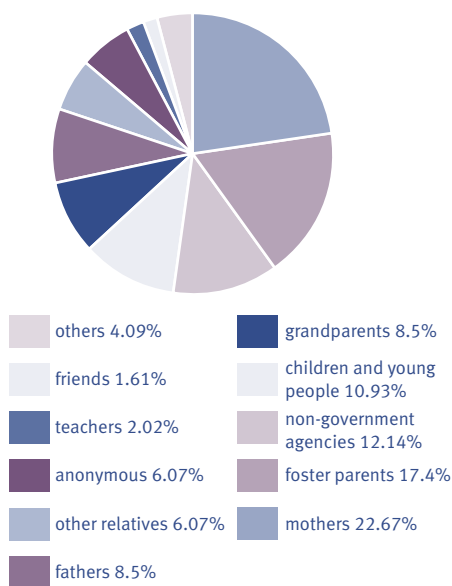
As a further initiative to support the wellbeing of children and young people, the Unit established a toll free number in all youth detention centres and adult correctional centres. This enables both young people and their parents to

contact the Commission about relevant concerns.

As a result of the Commission's action on complaints, 247 written responses were received from service providers and authorities about positive action taken on behalf of the children and young people involved. Of these, 210 (85%) resulted in appropriate action which supported the interests of the child or young person. Of these matters, 31 (12.5%) were still the subject of legal/administrative investigation at 30 June 2002, while 6 (2.5%) were being dealt with by alternative avenues of redress, such as referral to the Ombudsman or the Children Services Tribunal.

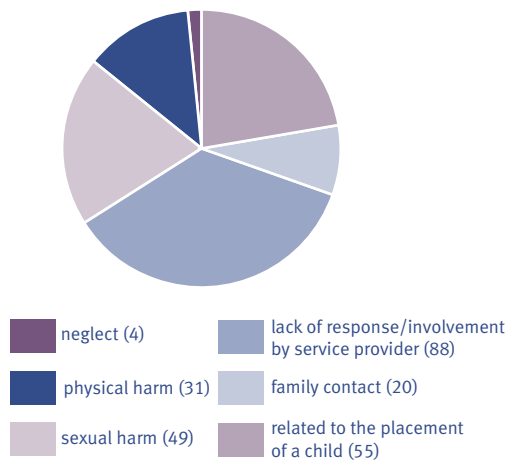
The Complaints and Investigations Unit issued 149 reminder notices where

**Complainants in 2001-2002**



# ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITY - *Complaints and Investigations*

**Nature of Complaints  
in 2001-2002**



Note: 56.75% of all formal complaints were received from outside Brisbane.

formal responses to the Commissioner were overdue, and 283 letters were sent to members of the public about their contact with the Commission. These letters included information about the action taken in response to concerns raised by or on behalf of children and young people.

The Unit's staff were also regularly involved in a variety of projects, and committees such as the Detention of Children in Watchhouses Liaison Committee and Let's Get Loud project. In addition, the Manager, Complaints and Investigations, regularly met with grandparents' groups whose members were carers, or had concerns for their grandchildren, to ensure those children and young people received appropriate services and protection.

## OUTLOOK

In 2001-2002, the Complaints and Investigations Unit initiated the development of a new information management system to effectively record and generate a range of relevant data about the complaints the Commission receives. This is expected to be finalised in the 2002-2003 financial year.

The staff will continue to advocate through their representation on child protection and children services committees.

Funding for 0.6 of a full time position has been allocated to the Unit in addition to the two permanent staff for the 2002-2003 financial year to meet increasing workload requirements.

There is expected to be greater recognition of the role the Complaints and Investigation Unit plays in the Commission as a result of staff being nominated for a range of child protection awards.



## CASE STUDY

*The Complaints and Investigations Unit received information that a young person in care of the Department of Families was to be reunited with a parent, despite evidence suggesting the young person was at risk of further physical and emotional harm from the parent.*

*A complaint letter was sent to the Director-General, Department of Families, as the child was under a care and protection order. After further evidence arose suggesting the child was also a victim of a criminal offence, the Commission wrote to the Assistant Commissioner, State Crime Operations Command, Queensland Police Service.*

*Under the Commission for Children and Young People Act 2000, any letter of complaint from the Commission to a relevant agency requires a response detailing any action taken by the agency to address the concerns raised.*

*As a result of this action, the Department of Families notified the Commission that after further consideration the young person would not be placed at home, as their safety could not be guaranteed. In addition, the Queensland Police Service formally charged the perpetrator with abuse against the child as a result of information forwarded by the Commission.*

*This intervention ensured the young person was placed in a safe, supportive environment, instead of being returned to a situation that would have almost certainly placed them at risk of significant harm.*

*This case demonstrates how the Complaints and Investigations Unit ensures all relevant factors are considered in determining the future of children and young people. The Commission ensures the young person's rights, interests and wellbeing is paramount in any decision-making process.*