

# Commissioner's Report



**Robin Sullivan**  
Commissioner for  
Children and Young People

It has been a busy year for the Commission for Children and Young People as we consolidate our operations.

The demands on staff and the Senior Executive Team this financial year have been enormous, but our people have risen to the challenge. I would like to thank them for their hard work and dedication in bringing the Commission to the position it is in today.

The work of the Commission in this time can be broadly categorised into proactive and reactive responses to safeguarding the rights, interests and wellbeing of children and young people in Queensland.

## Proactive

The Commission has been particularly proactive in a range of areas this financial year.

### Working with Children Kit and training program

One of the most practical manifestations of this activity can be seen in the creation of the *Working with Children Kit* and its associated training program.

The kit promotes policies and practices which help create environments friendly to children and young people and keep them safe from harm. It complements the Commission's Working with Children Check and provides advice on a range of areas, including Codes of Conduct, recruitment and selection, planning activities and handling disclosures of harm. The uptake of the kit and accompanying training program has been enthusiastic and the Commission has received much complimentary feedback on the package.

## Child Labour Review

The Commission's Child Labour Review, which began in March 2003, was prompted by a range of issues, including reports of school-aged children working excessive hours, employment of children in adult entertainment and the need to address workplace conditions, including issues like workplace bullying.

Cabinet endorsed the Commission to undertake the review to ensure the rights of children and young people under 18 are protected in the workplace. Work on the review is still in train, but it is expected to canvass a broad range of issues and information about child labour in Queensland.

## Advocacy Training Program

The Executive Director, Barry Salmon visited our counterparts in New Zealand, the Office of the Commissioner for Children in June 2002, prompting us to follow in their footsteps by creating an Advocacy Training Program.

The one day training program will increase workers' understanding of how they can provide better support for, and advocate on behalf of, children and young people. It will focus on developing workers' advocacy skills, identifying different types of advocacy, introducing effective advocacy strategies and will list organisations which advocate on behalf of children and young people. Information on health, education, law, justice, employment and training and housing will be included.

The trial program is expected to be delivered to teacher aides, child care workers and people from a variety of community organisations in 2003-04.

## Volatile Substance Misuse

The Commission's report, *Volatile Substance Misuse in Queensland*, released in September 2002, details a seven step community engagement strategy to deal with the issue of volatile substance misuse (VSM) at a local level.

In January 2003, the Commission held a forum to make retailers aware of the issues surrounding volatile substance misuse and to promote and encourage responsible retail practices.

The Commission, the Queensland Government and Brisbane City Council also worked with retailers' associations to develop a statewide resource which includes tips for retailers on the responsible display and sale of solvents.

## Reactive

The nature of the Commission's work means we must respond to issues as they arise – whether in the public arena, or through our networks or services, including Complaints and Investigations, the Community Visitors and Employment Screening Services.

We faced some extremely challenging issues this financial year, not least, the allegations about abuse against children in foster care. In June 2003, the Commission was invited to oversee an audit into foster carer records in Queensland, conducted by independent child protection expert, Gwen Murray. The audit, and subsequent Crime and Misconduct Commission investigation are expected to be finalised next financial year.

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## Outlook

I believe the experiences of the past financial year have highlighted the need for an independent authority to advocate for and monitor services to children and young people in a range of areas.

While the Commission already has some powers to address concerns on behalf of individuals it is clear there is a need for a strengthened systemic oversight role at least in the short to medium term.

We must ensure that all services to children and young people, particularly the most vulnerable, are accountable, and operate in a transparent way.

I look forward in the next twelve months to the ongoing development of the Commission's role, including the new responsibility for screening childcare workers from 1 September 2003.

We will continue to monitor emerging issues and respond to them as required.

Robin Sullivan

Commissioner for Children and Young People