

Commissioner's report

RIGHTS



PROTECT

The Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian experienced major change in the 2004-05 financial year, a time of large-scale reform for Queensland's child safety system. The year has seen the Commission granted greater responsibilities through the *Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2000* to oversee and investigate the way in which the system is meeting the needs of Queensland's most vulnerable children. From 1 August 2004, the name of the Commission changed to include the role of Child Guardian.

The Commission's new responsibilities are the result of the State Government's endorsement of the Blueprint for reform following the Crime and Misconduct Commission's (CMC) *Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Foster Care in Queensland*, which released its findings in January 2004. The new child safety model provides the Commission with enhanced monitoring responsibilities to oversee the implementation of the child protection reforms.

The Commission's extended range of responsibilities include a new Child Guardian mandate, comprising a monitoring and audit role which provides stronger investigative powers and a child death review function. They also enhance the scope for complaints investigations, and visits by Community Visitors to all children in alternative care, including children in foster care.

BLUE CARD

This new legislative mandate enables checks of case files and case plans held by the Department of Child Safety. This allows the Commission to better monitor the system reforms as well as respond more effectively to children and young people on an individual basis.

Changes to the blue card

In the 2004-05 financial year, changes were also made to Part 6 of the *Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2000*, affecting employment screening provisions. These changes followed a review by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet with assistance from Commission staff, as required under the legislation following the first two years of the Act's operation.

The outcome was an expansion of blue card categories to include a number of new areas of employment to be screened and a range of other enhancements to strengthen the blue card system. This includes strengthening requirements for organisations to manage child protection risks to children and young people in the community. All regulated businesses and employers are now required to have a written risk management strategy in place by 16 January 2006 to foster safer environments which protect the children in receipt of their services from the risk of harm. These key enhancements are explained more fully in the body of this report.

The Commission's upcoming advertising campaign on changes to the blue card and new risk management training under development should help deliver this message. It is important our work in this area continues to support attitudinal and behavioural change.

Review of child labour in Queensland

The Commission finalised its review of child labour in Queensland in the 2004-05 financial year. The review examined options which would allow children and young people under 18 to receive the best possible protections in paid and unpaid employment. In its final report, the Commission recommended a tightening of legislation and regulations to protect young people, while recognising their right to work and the benefits of safe work. The final recommendations recognised the importance of protecting young workers from abuse and exploitation and protecting their right to an education. The Government responded by committing to a range of changes in the area.

Looking ahead

The Commission will continue to develop enhanced information systems, policies and practices to foster the ongoing organisational change necessary to support the reform of the state's child safety system.

This will provide greater transparency and accountability in Queensland's child safety system. I am committed to continuing our work with the government and the community to better protect and promote the rights and wellbeing of our children and young people, particularly those most vulnerable.

Our priorities for 2005-06 are to:

- continue to rigorously oversee the child safety reforms and drive more responsive services to children in alternative care through:
 - systemic monitoring and auditing
 - advocating for children and young people
 - producing an Annual Report on child deaths
 - improving complaints handling and resolution, and
 - making recommendations for improving the child safety and juvenile justice systems

- visiting children and young people in the child safety and juvenile justice system to get their views on the impact of the reforms and areas for further improvement
- implementing more efficient employment screening supplemented by risk management training for those in regulated businesses and regulated employment
- strengthening the monitoring, auditing and enforcement model for the blue card system
- contributing to prevention and targeted early intervention strategies for young people at risk by improving awareness of issues which increase the likelihood of vulnerable children entering the child safety and juvenile justice systems, and
- establishing the organisational infrastructure and corporate governance frameworks needed to drive improved safety and service outcomes.

Key challenges facing the Commission include further developing its information management systems and services to drive improved outcomes for children and young people, particularly:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children
- those with challenging behaviours or disabilities, and
- adolescents requiring complex service responses, including alternative care arrangements.

While it is critical that services offered to children and young people by the child protection system keep them safe, I also recognise the crucial role families and the community play in fostering safer environments and effective support networks.

Reform of the statutory child safety system is essential and strengthening the prevention and early intervention child protection framework must be Queensland's primary focus in the future.

Elizabeth Fraser
 Commissioner for Children and Young People
 and Child Guardian



Communication objectives

This report provides the Premier, Members of Parliament, key stakeholders and the people of Queensland with a comprehensive overview of the Commission's increased responsibilities and its key goals, priorities and achievements in 2004-05.

It is intended to provide those with an interest in the Commission's work with the opportunity to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of its operations in this period.

The report covers the Commission's key outcomes, performance highlights and how staff are working towards achieving targets in the future. It also gives readers the details of how improved governance and administration have enabled the Commission to fulfil its responsibilities and contribute to the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children and young people in Queensland. The report outlines progress against each of the Commission's following key operational areas:

- Child Guardian - systemic monitoring and audit, i.e. monitoring, investigations, child death review, community visitors and complaints
- communications
- employment screening
- policy, and
- research.

More information on the Commission can be found in the Commission's *Strategic Plan 2005-09*, the *2004-05 Ministerial Portfolio Statement* and on the Commission's website at www.ccypcg.qld.gov.au

Vision

A better life for Queensland children and young people, particularly those most vulnerable.

Mission

To improve the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children and young people in Queensland.

Principles

The Commission's guiding principles are:

- every child and young person is a valued member of society
- in decisions involving children or young people, their best interests are paramount, and their views and wishes should be taken into account with regard to their age and maturity
- children and young people are entitled to:
 - have their dignity and privacy respected
 - be cared for in ways that protect them from harm and promote their wellbeing
 - express concerns and grievances and have them dealt with in a fair, timely way that promotes their participation
 - receive information and help to exercise their entitlements, and
 - access services necessary to meet their needs.
- the family has primary responsibility for a child's upbringing and development and should be supported in that role.

Values

Integrity - our ethical principles

- We will provide honest, impartial advice to government and the community
- We will recognise that we are accountable for our actions and the resources assigned to do our job
- We will treat all people with fairness, respect, compassion and understanding
- We understand that the proof of our values will be in how we act and others perceive us

Leadership - our ability to make a difference

- We believe the essence of leadership is to have a vision for the future, a belief in the Commission's objectives and the courage to make a difference
- We believe leadership starts at the top but must be in all of us

Innovation - our ability to do our work better

- We understand that if we are to excel in what we do, we must be flexible and willing to adapt our services to meet the needs of children and the community
- We appreciate and support people who are willing to think of new concepts, suggest new ways of doing things, challenge the status quo and use their initiative to overcome obstacles
- While we look to the future we value the lessons of the past
- We recognise that continuous skills development is a fundamental building block of our innovative capacity
- We will support and encourage people for managing risks based on our core values

Collaboration - our ability to work with others

- We recognise that we must work as a team, have the involvement and respect of our stakeholders and have an integrated approach to service delivery to succeed
- We respect and value the wide variety of skills and experience within our staff and our stakeholders
- We will communicate our thoughts and intentions early, honestly and clearly
- We will involve people - particularly children and young people - from outside our organisation and will take account of their points of view

