

*"If it's safe for kids to go home then they should be allowed."<sup>89</sup>*

## **Successful reunifications**

*"[The Department of Child Safety should] let children who have responsible parents back into their care."<sup>90</sup>*

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89 Young person's view as quoted at page 96 of Child Guardian Views of Children and Young People in Foster Care, Queensland, 2008.

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# Successful reunifications

## Key messages

- There has been a slight, but not statistically significant, improvement reported by children and young people surveyed by the Child Guardian (in 2006 and 2008) in relation to successful reunifications. At present, the Department of Child Safety has no comparative data available.

## Expected outcome for children and young people

A successful reunification process will result in improved family functioning such that a child will not need to return to care.

## Significance

This indicator monitors how well the child safety system prepares families for reunification, and ensures children and young people return to a safe environment.

## How the child safety system is working together

Reunification involves collaborative case planning by the Department of Child Safety working with the child, family members and other persons, such as Recognised Entities, approved carers, and other government and non-government agencies, such as the Department of Communities and the Department of Housing.

## Key findings in 2007–08

### Reunification attempts

Nineteen percent of children and young people in out-of-home care told the Child Guardian Survey 2008<sup>91</sup> that they had been unsuccessfully reunified with their family on one or more occasions, which represents a slight improvement on the 21% reported in the 2006 survey.

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<sup>91</sup> A total of 1861 children and young people (from foster and residential care) responded to the Child Guardian's survey, administered in early 2008. The survey findings do not necessarily represent the views of all children and young people in out-of-home care.

## Child Safety Officer contact during reunification processes

There were 565 children known to the Community Visitor Program who were reunified with their families in 2007–08. Most reunifications (36% or 202) occurred for children aged 0–4 years, followed by the 5–9 year age group (26% or 145).

For the majority of children and young people, in the six months leading up to their reunification, no significant issues were raised in relation to their overall standard of care.

For children going through a reunification process that was not progressing well, lack of Child Safety Officer contact was frequently identified as a contributing factor to the issue:

- Of the 70 Community Visitor Serious Issue<sup>92</sup> reports relating to problems with a reunification process, 20% identified a lack of Child Safety Officer contact, and
- A further 30% of children and young people raised concerns with their Community Visitor about the level of support they were receiving from their Child Safety Officer in the six months prior to reunification. (These concerns were resolved locally and did not require escalation to a Serious Issue Form.)

### 2007–08 Child Guardian activities about reunification

#### Advocacy during reunification

The Child Guardian successfully advocated on behalf of a number of individual children and young people during the year when concerns were raised about reunification processes.

#### Community Visitor reporting

The Child Guardian has revised its reporting framework to better analyse and capture data and information about the service needs and planning for children and young people who the Department of Child Safety intends reunifying with their family.

#### Child Guardian Stamp of Approval



The Department of Child Safety's 'One Chance at Childhood' initiative will provide intensive assistance to parents of children (aged 0-4 years), whose case planning goal is reunification.

### Strategic action areas for 2008–09

The Child Guardian's monitoring and reporting on outcomes of reunification processes will continue to evolve in the year ahead as greater information management system capability is established. In particular, better data about renotifications, resubstantiations and re-entry to out-of-home care subsequent to reunification will be sought from the Department of Communities.

92 Further explanation of Serious Issues is provided in Appendix C of this report.