

# Executive summary

## Introduction

The child safety system includes the services collectively delivered by the Department of Communities (which now incorporates the former Department of Child Safety) as lead agency and relevant government and non-government service providers, including Queensland Health and the Department of Education and Training, to children whom the Department of Communities becomes aware because of allegations of harm or risk of harm, regardless of whether they enter out-of-home care.

The Child Guardian is the independent, external monitor of the child safety system's ability to provide services which meet the needs of children and young people at both an individual and systemic level. The Child Guardian role involves monitoring, investigating, complaints resolution, advocacy about laws, policies and procedures, and visits to children and young people in out-of-home care by Community Visitors. The Child Guardian also has a role in chairing the Child Death Case Review Committee, which reviews the services that were delivered to children and young people in the child safety system before their death.<sup>1</sup>

A child or young person enters the child safety system when the Department of Communities receives information that they may have been harmed or that they may be at risk of harm. Depending on the Department of Communities' assessment of a child or young person's needs, any of the following can occur:

- a decision is made not to intervene
- a referral is made to family support services
- intervention may occur in the family home to reduce ongoing risk factors, or
- the child or young person enters out-of-home care, including foster care, residential care or kinship care.

In 2007–08 the former Department of Child Safety reported that a total of 71,885<sup>2</sup> intakes were received, with an assessment outcome of either a Child Concern Report (46,882) or Notification (25,003).<sup>3</sup> Every decision, action or inaction by child safety system service providers in relation to the children and young people the subject of these intakes fell within the Child Guardian's jurisdiction in that time period.

At 30 June 2008 there were 6942 children and young people under child protection orders in Queensland.<sup>4</sup> During the year the Child Guardian's Community Visitors were regularly visiting this

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1 For further information about the Child Death Case Review Committee, see <http://www.ccypcg.qld.gov.au/about/publications>.

2 Unpublished data, Department of Child Safety, 2008.

3 Unpublished data, Department of Child Safety, 2008.

4 Unpublished data, Department of Child Safety, 2008.

group<sup>5</sup> of children and young people and conducted a total of 43,453 visits. The Child Guardian also surveyed children and young people in out-of-home care (in both foster care and residential facilities) during 2007–08.

On 26 March 2009 the Premier implemented new departmental arrangements for the Queensland public service. Under these new arrangements, the Department of Child Safety was amalgamated with, and declared to be part of, the Department of Communities. In this report, I have retained references to the former Department of Child Safety as it was the relevant government entity for the reporting period 2007–08. Future Child Guardian Reports, that is 2008–09 onwards, will refer to the new Department of Communities as lead agency for child protection in Queensland.

## Child safety system performance against the Child Guardian Key Outcome Indicators for 2007–08

<p><b>Effective assessment</b> – page 9</p>	<p>From the available data, it is apparent that the vast majority of the Department of Child Safety’s 24 hour response Investigation and Assessments were actioned within the required timeframe. There is less evidence available in relation to Investigation and Assessments assigned a 5 or 10 day response. In the future, the Department of Child Safety’s Integrated Client Management System (ICMS) is expected to be able to fully report on the timeliness of its completion of all Investigation and Assessments.</p>
<p><b>Appropriate interventions</b> – page 16</p>	<p>The rate of Queensland children and young people in out-of-home care increased from 2006–07 to 2007–08, but is in line with the national average. A number of initiatives providing tailored intervention services to children and young people and their families have been established and efforts are currently being applied to improving the pathways to these services.</p>
<p><b>Safe out-of-home care</b> – page 21</p>	<p>There is reliable evidence that children and young people overwhelmingly feel safe in out-of-home care. Further, based upon Department of Child Safety data, the substantiated instances of children and young people being harmed or at risk of harm while in out-of-home care has decreased from 9% of the out-of-home care population in 2004/05, to 3% in 2007–08.</p>
<p><b>Stable out-of-home care</b> – page 27</p>	<p>81% of children and young people who responded to the <i>Child Guardian – Views of children and young people in foster care 2008</i> survey indicated they had less than three placements during their time in care. It is anticipated that, over time, initiatives such as the Department of Child Safety <i>One Chance at Childhood</i> initiative will drive improvements in this measure.</p>
<p><b>Individual needs met</b> – page 32</p>	<p>Many children and young people in out-of-home care told the Child Guardian during the year that they do not feel listened to or adequately supported by their Child Safety Officer.</p>
<p><b>Best education possible</b> – page 37</p>	<p>A significant proportion (76%) of children and young people in out-of-home care are receiving assistance with their education through Educational Support Plans. Importantly, the vast majority of children and young people who have Education Support Plans report they are helpful. However, many children and young people in out-of-home care did not achieve the literacy and numeracy national benchmarks.</p>

5 Community Visitors visit children and young people who reside in foster care and residential facilities. A small number of children and young people under child protection orders in Queensland are subject to orders allowing them to remain at home with appropriate support and are not within the Community Visitors’ jurisdiction. As at 30 June 2007, this number was 632. A comparative figure as at 30 June 2008 was not available.

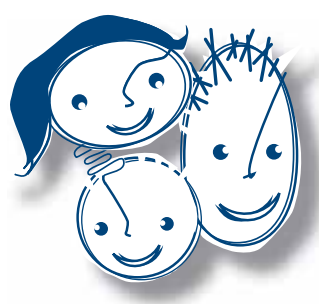
<p><b>Best health possible</b> – page 43</p>	<p>The available evidence suggests that gaps currently exist in the child safety system’s response to the health needs of children and young people in out-of-home care, in relation to both assessing their needs and facilitating access to health services.</p>
<p><b>Special needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children met</b> – page 47</p>	<p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people remain over represented in out-of-home care, with increases noted in 2007–08. In the same period, the Department of Child Safety has sought to implement and strengthen services to remote communities in an effort to increase the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child safety system.</p>
<p><b>Successful reunifications</b> – page 51</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p><b>Successful transitions to independence</b> – page 54</p>	<p>Young people are seeking greater assistance from the Department of Child Safety in preparing them to transition from out-of-home care when they turn 18. When responding to the Child Guardian Survey 2008, approximately 40% of young people aged 16-17 years reported they had not been spoken to about what happens when they turn 18, and only 25% of eligible young people in foster care and 18% in residential care said they had a Leaving Care Plan.</p>

**Key initiatives and investments planned by service providers in the year ahead**

When seeking feedback on my provisional report, I invited comment from service providers on key initiatives and investments in relation to the areas of service delivery highlighted in this report. A summary of their responses is provided in each relevant chapter.

**Stamp of approval**

When looking through this report, keep an eye out for the Child Guardian’s Stamp of Approval, which looks like this:



This Stamp of Approval is used to highlight examples of positive child-focused service delivery by the Department of Child Safety, other government service providers, non-government service providers and foster carers. The Stamp of Approval is also used to highlight examples of individuals and agencies responding appropriately to advocacy or action by the Child Guardian in order to create an immediate good outcome for children and young people.