

Foreword

As the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, I independently monitor the Queensland child safety system and have a responsibility to publicly report on its performance.

The *Child Guardian Report 2007–08* represents my report on the performance of the child safety system during 2007–08.

In my prior Child Guardian Report I introduced a framework that I had agreed with government service providers (in 2006) for monitoring the effectiveness of the priority areas of service delivery within the child safety system. This framework is called the Child Guardian Key Outcome Indicators.

The *Child Guardian Key Outcome Indicators* are an agreed means of conducting focussed monitoring and reporting on the performance of the child safety system, from the perspective of the children and young people who receive its services.

The Child Guardian Key Outcome Indicators allow me to monitor and report on the effectiveness of the child safety system from a whole-of-government perspective. By examining the service delivery of all government service providers comprising the child safety system, including the Department of Communities (which now incorporates the former Department of Child Safety), Department of Education and Training and Queensland Health, the Child Guardian Key Outcome Indicators have the potential to highlight both performance in priority areas of service delivery and also the impact of the integration (or otherwise) of these priority areas on outcomes across the service delivery continuum.

During the year I have negotiated with government service providers and implemented a second phase of ‘monitoring plans’ under the *Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2000*, covering the period 2007–2010. Monitoring plans are an important legal mechanism available to the Child Guardian to gather information and data about the child safety system’s performance.

The *Child Guardian Key Outcome Indicators* enable the integration of services to be assessed, over time, which enables pressure points to be identified and either actioned immediately or more closely monitored.

In negotiating the current monitoring plans with service providers, it has become evident that developing existing service system capacity for reporting on outcomes remains an important area for action. This work is critical to the effective oversight of service delivery to children and young people and in planning for future services.

It is my intention in the coming year to continue to advocate strongly for an increased emphasis on reporting about outcomes for children and young people by service providers, as a means of improving their insight into their own effectiveness and building system sustainability.

By working within the existing limitations of the external data and relying on my internal data, survey work and qualitative audit activities, I have made a number of observations about the performance of the child safety system in 2007–08. These observations include confirmation that an overwhelming number of children and young people in out-of-home care report feeling safe. It is also apparent that a high rate of the former Department of Child Safety's priority 1 Investigation and Assessments were commenced in a timely manner. The situation is less clear in relation to the priority 2 and 3 Investigation and Assessments. It would appear that scope also exists for children and young people in out-of-home care to be more involved in important decisions about them as individuals and for closer monitoring of service delivery inputs and cultural outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care.

As more data about service delivery outcomes progressively becomes available, a fuller assessment will be possible of the effectiveness of the child safety system in meeting the needs of at-risk children and young people and those already in out-of-home care.

The effectiveness of non-statutory interventions in addressing family risk factors is a variable with the potential for major impacts on the performance of the child safety system. In broad terms, Queensland currently performs in-line with the national average in relation to the rate at which children and young people enter out-of-home care. Some states have lower rates, such as Victoria, but others, such as New South Wales, have higher rates. Work is currently underway by government service providers to improve the quality and capacity of family support services as a major prevention and intervention initiative. It may be the case that until the investment in this area of service delivery is optimised, and further gains are realised, resources within the statutory element of the child safety system will be less available to deliver on well-being outcomes.

The present day out-of-home care element of the child safety system represents a genuine safety net. The major challenge facing the government and community now is reducing the pressure on the statutory element of the child safety system by responding earlier and more effectively to problems within at-risk families.

Therefore, the conclusions that can be drawn about the performance of the child safety system in 2007–08 are mixed: on the one hand, scope still exists to improve the well-being of children and young people in out-of-home care, but on the other hand, the underlying safety concerns about children and young people in out-of-home care that came to light in the 2004 Crime and Misconduct Commission inquiry into abuse in foster care appear to have been addressed. That is not to say that, from time to time, individual tragedies or community specific safety concerns will not arise. The service response continues to provide a solution, often by performing a parental role, to address problems that arise in the privacy of people's homes. By design, each case will be complex and challenging for the dedicated staff and agencies that deliver this service response.

In my view, the next phase in the evolution of the child safety system is for the government and community to reach a common understanding of service delivery performance, based on objective evidence, so that risks and pressure points are identified early and actioned before they manifest or repeat and genuine service delivery successes are readily acknowledged by all. Ideally, the effect of the statutory system should also, over time, be proven to extend beyond the delivery of services to vulnerable children and young people across a linear continuum, and positively act at another (higher) level as a key prevention mechanism, capable of interrupting cycles forming across generations.

The agencies comprising the child safety system are aware of my views on these issues. In the year ahead I will continue to seek the views of, and be a voice for, Queensland's most vulnerable children and young people, wherever I believe the service response, and outcomes, can be strengthened.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Fraser
**Commissioner for Children and Young People
and Child Guardian**