

## ***Tim Reddel***

- Welcome to the Commission's inaugural annual Early Years Forum.
- My name is Tim Reddel and I am the Executive Director at the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian. I will be your MC today during our whole group sessions – which are until morning tea and then after afternoon tea.
- It is fabulous to see so many people from the broad early years sector here today – those involved in health, education, child care, family support, child development, infant mental health, Indigenous issues, disability, cultural and linguistic diversity, children's rights and child safety.
- The interest in this event demonstrates to me the commitment and energy that exists for supporting children (antenatal to eight years) and their families.
- I know that we have many front-line service providers and people involved in policy development or research attending. Personnel from state and federal government departments are represented, in addition to non-government services, peak bodies and universities. There are also people who have traveled from rural areas to be here today.
- Demonstrates the commitment and passion that stakeholders have around prevention and early intervention
- Recognition that it is only through providing the best supports for all children that we can make a difference to child wellbeing and reduce rates of child harm into the future.
- There is a growing understanding that environments and experiences for very young children are critical – impact on longterm outcomes
- And that to do this we must support families as the most important people in children's lives.
- That this involves the efforts of many personnel – health, education, child care, therapeutic – multifactorial
- Collaborative efforts required
- There is growing national and international consensus that improved joint planning will enable service responses to better meet the needs of children and families in contemporary society
- Policy directions are guiding joined up responses and many of you in front-line services are doing this on a daily basis. We will hear more about this today.
- Before I pass over to Elizabeth Fraser, the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, I will cover a few housekeeping issues.
- The toilets are near the stairs, directly behind the lifts.
- In the case of an emergency we need to proceed to the exits and assemble near S block (which is near the car park) - there will be fire wardens who will direct us.

- We have scheduled long breaks for morning tea and lunch today as an important part of the forum is acknowledged to be an opportunity for networking and information sharing among personnel. We will let you know when it is 10 minutes prior to the end of the breaks so that we can start back on time.

### ***Elizabeth Fraser***

- I would like to concur with Tim that it is heartening to see the level of interest in prevention and early intervention focused on our very youngest children, that I see here today.
- The impetus for this forum has arisen from the feedback we have heard from you – that there is a need for greater attention to be given to prevention and early intervention services for young children.
- - that it is only through supporting positive environments and experiences for all children and in particular those who are most vulnerable - from the very earliest times in a child's life - that we will be able to alter some of the concerning trends in child wellbeing and specifically the indelible harm that is done to children when they are abused or neglected.
- To change child abuse trends and make a long term difference to the wellbeing of individuals and society as a whole, prevention and early intervention must be a key focus.
- This not only makes intuitive sense - we know that it is grounded in a strong evidence base.
- Research identifies the efficacy of early intervention programs for improving outcomes later in life. We also know that treating established problems is extremely difficult, very expensive and more likely to be ineffective.
- At the Commission we have identified our mission as being to “improve the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children and young people in Queensland”. Promoting prevention and targeted early intervention strategies for vulnerable children and young people is a key strategic objective for the Commission in this area.
- There is also growing understanding nationally and internationally that ‘traditional’ models of discrete service delivery may not be adequately responding to the complex needs presented by young children and their families in contemporary society.
- We have also heard concerns from many of you that services can be fragmented and uncoordinated and that there is a need for collaboration and improved communication.
- Our growing understanding of the multidimensional nature of problems and how the complex interplay of the contexts of a child's life, and the child's personal characteristics, interact to directly and indirectly affect child wellbeing are guiding more holistic, multidisciplinary responses to many of the issues children and families are experiencing.

- Services that are more comprehensive and coordinated are believed to be of particular assistance to children and families who are disadvantaged or marginalised. This includes families with limited resources, those who experience barriers to service access (including trust in services), and where cycles of poverty or abuse exist.
- There is also a recognition of the need to build more supportive communities for children and families and a better interface between services and communities. This requires communities to be engaged in defining their service needs and responses to these needs.
- Developing more integrated service responses requires joint planning and coordination across government departments and levels of government and also at the local service level.
- Whole-of-government policy responses are required which need to be owned and shaped at the local level.
- Importantly, to best support all children and engage those most in need we must normalise services available to children and families – to resource, inform, skill, and empower.
- Developing whole-of-government service responses which focus on prevention, early detection and early intervention and which engage communities and improve coordination at the local level requires us to think outside the box we know. This is a challenge we are all grappling with.
- Some movement in this direction is happening and we will hear about some innovative programs seeking to do these things today along with the state and federal policies that are directing them.
- I hope that today will be a step in progressing these issues further. Ongoing dialogue around prevention and early intervention responses is needed to consider new service responses, to learn from what is working well and identify where gaps occur.
- The Commission plans to hold this forum as an annual event.

The aims for this annual forum are to:

- promote information sharing about prevention and early intervention policy, research and program initiatives among service providers, state and federal government departments, non-government organisations, peak bodies and universities;
- provide an opportunity for face-to-face networking to improve linkages and collaboration among services; and
- showcase initiatives that address service gaps and highlight ideas for future developments, including where effective linkages or collaboration among agencies has occurred.
- It may be that future forums will focus on specific issues if this seems appropriate.
- The Commission's Early Years Strategic Network, which is primarily an email forum for sharing information on the wellbeing of infants, young children and their families (including research, publications, program initiatives, policy

developments, conferences and seminars) is the group through which people will be invited to the Early Years Forum.

- We recognise that this network is in no way comprehensive and ask you if you know of other people who you believe should be invited to join this network that they contact the Commission.
- Finally, I would like to thank today's presenters
- We are hoping to make many of the PowerPoint presentations available on the Commission's website after this event and have also provided contact details for presenters on the program.