

# The Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian

promoting and protecting the rights, interests and wellbeing of all Queenslanders under 18

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**Advice to:** David Ponet, UNICEF  
**Topic:** Child Participation in Government  
**Date due:** 30 October 2009

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Thank you for inviting comment from the Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian (the Commission) in relation to children and young people's participation in government.

## **Summary of the Commission's facilitation of child participation in government:**

The Commission provides a voice for vulnerable and often otherwise voiceless children and young people in Queensland by communicating their views to the Queensland and Australian Governments in the following ways:

1. publishing its Views of Children and Young People in Queensland survey reports, which provide a measure of performance for the child protection and juvenile justice divisions of the Queensland Government, as well as informing policy and planning in these areas, and
2. engaging with, and utilising the views of, children and young people in the development of the Commission's policy and advocacy positions.

## **1. Views of children and young people in state care as government performance measures**

A key mechanism by which the Commission's engagement with children and young people impacts on policy and planning is through its Views of Children and Young People surveys. These are regular surveys of children and young people living in foster, kinship and residential care and in youth detention in Queensland. The 'Views' research is the largest ongoing study of its kind in the world directly involving children and young people in care. Since the research commenced in 2006, more than 10,000 surveys have been completed.

Such is the power of the children's and young people's views that several items have been included at the specific request of government stakeholders. Many are now used by government agencies as performance measures and have become the focus of further policy development or practice consideration. As a result, children and young people are directly providing measures to Government on aspects of the performance of a government department. Information in the various Views reports is a rich source of primary data that provides important insights into aspects of the child protection and youth justice systems. The research is also used by the Commission to independently monitor the effectiveness of government services by focussing on outcomes for children and young people, and has been used to direct attention to:

- improving placement stability in care
- strengthening education and therapeutic supports in care
- improved contact with case workers and considering children's views during decision making, and
- supporting young people when leaving care or detention.

In addition to the major Views reports, young person friendly reports are developed for and distributed to children and young people in care and in detention to show them that their views are being heard and genuinely represented. These reports also demonstrate to children and young people that they have the capacity to inform and influence the child protection and youth justice systems' policy and practice.

## **2. Engaging with children and young people to formulate Commission policy and advocacy positions**

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The Commission's Engaging with Children and Young People Strategy is founded on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the principles of giving children and young people a voice in decisions that impact on their wellbeing. The Commission promotes and supports the active participation of children and young people in its policy development, advocacy to government and service delivery work. For example, the Federal Government is currently undertaking an inquiry into the impact of violence on young Australians. The Commission has conducted focus groups in partnership with a youth organisation and a school in Brisbane to gather young people's thoughts on the impact of violence in their lives. This information will be used in the Commission's submission to the Government to advocate on behalf of young people as well as representing their feelings and opinions on the subject. It is hoped that the voice of young people will be heard and help to influence policy change to promote the safety of young people across Australia.

Conveying the experiences of young people to the Australian government has enabled the Commission to successfully influence national policy directions. For example in 2008, the Commission provided specific case studies of young people from the Commission's 2007/2008 audit of self-placing young people in out-of-home care to respond to the Australian Government's Green Paper: *Which Way Home? A New Approach to Homelessness*. The Commission used the key message from the young people's stories, which was their experience of marginalisation from mainstream services and falling through service gaps, to recommend that the Australian Government:

- adopt an integrated case management approach which provides a personalised and tailored response to assist, mentor and encourage vulnerable young people
- improve collaboration and flexibility to address service gaps and increase children and young people's access to relevant services, and
- increase supply of appropriate accommodation via discussions with governments, the community sector and businesses.

The Australian Government's White Paper reflected these recommendations, which were based on actual young people's experiences, and included commitments to:

- a 'no exits into homelessness' from statutory care policy
- a new, integrated whole-of-government approach to the complexity of homelessness
- more realistic funding to increase both the supply of affordable and supported housing as well as services to prevent and reduce homelessness
- greater collaboration and flexibility between mainstream and homeless services, and
- establishing a mechanism to harness the corporate and private sector.

Please do not hesitate to contact Yvette Norris, Principal Policy Officer, Strategic Policy and Research, ph: 3211 6960 (16960); e-mail:

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