

QUEENSLAND KINSHIP CARE FORUM PROGRAM

Queensland Kinship Care Forum

Hosted by PeakCare Queensland, in partnership with Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP), CREATE Foundation and Queensland Foster and Kinship Care (QFKC).

2 September 2019

Attendance

We were very pleased to see so many people with an interest in family care/kinship care, attending the forum, and we were especially pleased that so many kinship carers were able to take time out of their busy lives to attend.

Overall 88 participants (including presenters)

17 kinship carers

41 non-government agency staff from 19 non-government agencies

1 from Universities

1 private consultant

26 Queensland government (Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women and Queensland Police) staff

2 Commonwealth government (Department of Human Services/Centrelink) staff

Background to the forum

Over recent years there have been a growing range of initiatives focussed on kinship care across the country, and calls to address the common issues for kinship carers nationally. Most recently there was a Senate Inquiry in 2014 about grandparents raising grandchildren, the NSW Child Protection Peak body (ACWA) held a conference in 2018 with a dedicated stream of presentations on kinship care, there was a National Kinship Care Forum held at the Australian Human Rights Commission in Sydney in 2018, and a survey of kinship care policy across the Australian jurisdictions commissioned by ACWA late last year. There has been research underway since 2016 in Western Australia, in a partnership between Wanslea Family Services (a community agency) and two universities, which have specifically looked at children in the full time care of their grandparents and they too are advocating for improved recognition and government support for these kinship carers.

The New South Wales Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) received a grant to follow up on their previous work, and they coordinated and funded Dr Lucy Peake's Australian tour. PeakCare, along with the child protection peak bodies in other states and territories, organised events in each jurisdiction to host Dr Peake. Hence, the Queensland Kinship Care Forum came into being!

Current context in Queensland

In Queensland we are just over half way through a significant reform process following the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry handing down its final report in July 2013. The current Queensland Government plan for guiding the reform, *Supporting Families Changing Futures*, has a key focus area on redesigning the placement and care system overall to better meet the complex needs of children in care, and alongside this is a commitment to better assistance and support for carers.

Key Queensland child protection statistics, as at 31 March 2019:

- 10 403 children subject to protective orders in Queensland (includes Court Assessment Orders and Child Protection Orders)
- 4463 (43%) of these children are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children
- 4237 (41%) of all children on protective orders were placed in foster care
- 4058 (39%) of all children on protective orders were placed in kinship care
- The rest are with parents, residential care, semi independent living and other settings
- 3530 approved foster carers
- 1555 approved kinship carers - 366 (23%) Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander kinship carers and 1189 (76%) non Indigenous kinship carers
- Unknown number of children living with family/relative carers through informal arrangements (no child protection involvement) – anecdotal information....
 - Queensland Foster and Kinship Care estimate approx. 30% of enquiries for support relate to informal care arrangements
 - Time for Grandparents program (who support informal grandparent carers across the state) currently support approx. 700 grandparents with over 1000 children, a quarter of these are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander kinship care families
 - Research from other jurisdictions internationally show there are about three times as many children in informal care arrangements as in formal care, equating to an estimate of over 12 000 children living with informal carer families in Queensland

Purpose of the kinship care forum

Kinship carers often provide more stable care than other forms of care – this continuity of care, contact with other extended family and a sense of normality for children, provides a lifelong support network which has a positive impact on identity, belonging and wellbeing. These benefits for children often come at a cost for carer families, and this forum was about how we might progress kinship care policy and practice in Queensland to better support kinship carers and further enhance these positive outcomes for children who are being raised by kinship carers.

Special acknowledgements:

New South Wales Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies (ACWA) who coordinated and funded Dr Peake’s Australian tour.

Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP), CREATE Foundation and Queensland Foster and Kinship Care (QFKC) for assisting PeakCare with the planning for this forum.

Jo Roff, Area Manager from IFYS, who contributed significantly to the planning and organisation of the event, and funded Dr Meredith Kiraly’s attendance.

Our colleagues from the Australian Government and local agencies who contributed to the panel sessions, in particular Hannah, a young person with a kinship care experience, who shared her insights about the benefits and challenges she experienced living in kinship care and Tracey, a young kinship carer, who shared her difficult experience of trying to get information and support after she took on the care of her sister's children.

Dr Meredith Kiraly from the University of Melbourne, who provided key summary points from Australian kinship care research.

Dr Lucy Peake, our international guest, whose work establishing a model for supporting kinship carers, and her tireless advocacy for kinship carers, inspired us all.

A massive thankyou to the kinship carers who were wonderful participants with a commitment to sharing your experiences and working together to find better solutions.

PeakCare would like to thank everyone who participated in sharing ideas, suggestions, potential solutions and learnings about how we might move forward to improve current policy and practice relating to kinship care. We hope this forum was a small step in enabling us all to play our part in improving the Queensland experience for children and their families and kinship carers.

Forum Presentations

Please see attached presentations from the forum by

- Dr Lucy Peake
- Dr Meredith Kiraly
- Dion Tatow (Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak)
- Dulcie Bronsch (Time for Grandparents Program, Uniting Care Community)
- Brochures - Time for Grandparents
- Information sheet – Support for non parent carers, Department of Human Services/ Centrelink

In addition, see below summary notes compiled by PeakCare from various sessions at the forum; and

A one page summary attempting to highlight the key issues is also attached.

Notes from the Forum

Initial Activity – brain storm top three things we need to think about today (collated written notes from participants)

Voice of Kin Carers

- Feedback from kinship carers about how they need/want to be supported
- Perspectives from kinship carers about what works well, what can be done better

Learning from others

- To learn and get a better understanding
- Look at how other support informal kinship carers
- Learn from what is working well elsewhere
- Listening to shared ideas to get a better understanding of kinship care

National approach

- Need a national strategy for how we support all kinship carers, formal and informal
- Federal / state interface

Model of kinship care

- Kinship care should be recognised as different to general foster care
- Kinship care to be looked at more like family support, not placement
- Expectations on kin
- Make family support “normal”
- Recognition of all kinship carers not just grandparent carers
- Kinship carers have unique needs, require specialised support
- Establish model for kinship care, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
- Different motivation to care
- Address disparity in supports for kinship carers
- Equal resources for formal and informal kinship carers
- Ensure we measure the wellbeing of carers

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship care

- Establish a model specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship care
- Adhering to the Child Placement Principle

Research

- Research outside the square
- Who is doing research really well

Data

- More data collection

Advocacy

- More advocacy
- What advocacy groups of kinship care are out there

Information and resources

- Referral agencies
- What supports are available to informal kinship carers
- What resources are out there

Support needs

- Improved communication
- Support with internal family fractures
- Support groups
- Training and support for kinship carers
- Preparation and support of carers from the beginning (provisional assessment)
- Help to navigate the system
- Recognition of the complex needs of kinship carers, the children and wider family
- Financial assistance
- Recognition of informal carers
- More detailed support

Statutory kinship care

- Travel and permission
- Interstate difficulties because of different state arrangements
- Family contact
- Reunification
- Changes of staff
- Confidentiality
- Managing risks
- Transition to long term care
- Strategies to overcome barriers eg blue cards, family contact, education, relationships with departmental workers
- Tailored assessment process for kinship carers
- Clarifying role of the department and of NGOs
- Recognising role of NGOs in supporting kinship carers

End of day table groups workshop activity – next steps, priorities for action (collated written notes from participants)

(++ means multiple people said the same thing)

National peak/representative/advocacy body ++++++

- Voice of kinship carers
- Hub or one stop shop, national website
- Ensures consistency across the states and territories in financial support, training, other support, communications, IT etc
- Easier coordination and communication across the states and territories, ability to pool resources across federal and state
- State conferences and kinship care week

- Research and evidence re best practice applied to whole system, pulling together data and research in one place
- Central place to access all information and advice
- Valuing of kinship care
- Influencing policy +

Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreement on kinship care

- More investment in kinship care, both formal and informal

New model of kinship care

- Ensure voice of child is heard
- Separate foster and kinship care +
- More focus on kinship care +
- Separate Peak bodies
- Specific kinship care legislation +
- Family is a priority in all child protection legislation, so change system to recognise and support family care without people having to become a formal carer
- Importance of the five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principal
- Processes for finding kin, family genogram mapping
- Fund NGOs to do family finding and family support (remove from statutory child protection)

Clear definitions of kin and appropriate cultural authority to identify kin ++++

- “Community kin”/kith/significant other (non-related) should not be classified as kinship care (inaccurate and distorts data)
- Identify type of kin eg grandparent, aunt/uncle, sibling etc
- Recognised formal and informal care arrangements

Processes for assessment and training of kinship carers

- Provisional assessment processes so child does not have to go to stranger-care
- Blue card review currently – potential opportunity to address carer issues
- Assessment process can be a barrier currently
- Winangay assessment tool (can be adapted for non-Indigenous)
- Streamlined process for connecting children with kin/family more quickly (legal, paperwork etc)
- Improve re-assessment process to minimise daunting impact on carers about whether they can continue to care
- Initial training and education for kinship carers – training specific to kinship carers, in home, short blocks of time ++

Support for kinship carers

- Peer support groups/meeting points for kinship carers throughout Queensland ++
- Look at options to expand Time for Grandparents UCC program) ++
- Levels of support might vary in intensity eg intensive support at arrival of children and transition times, agile/flexible – step up step down

- Specific support for young people turning 18 – accommodation support, work readiness etc
- One on one support worker
- Different needs to foster care – early support +/-family support/community based approach
- Access to universal and secondary supports for kinship carer families
- Access to specific therapeutic supports, including grief and loss, attachment, trauma, family systems etc to assist kin carers with the complexity of kin care +
- More support in managing wider family issues, particularly if parents do not support placement, which impact on carer and children
- Support to identify and contact other family and extended family (eg absent fathers)
- Access to specialist advice
- Educational support package for children, educational support plans, tutoring, homework clubs etc
- Support to keep siblings together and support to maintain contact where siblings are separated
- Minimise school disruptions/moves
- Support commences when placement commences, no delay
- Care package/Information package, access to resources for carers to be available at time of placement +
- Check in (with children and carer) within first days of placement, not just ‘dumping’ children
- Much more than financial
- Respite - formal and informal
- Not respite like foster care where the child goes to another stranger, kin carers looking for time for themselves, some time out without the children
- babysitting service for carers
- Support with understanding legal rights
- Understanding the differences between child protection and family court orders
- Potential use of volunteers to support
- Brokerage to assist with the health and wellbeing of kinship carers
- Flexible funding for support
- Support for children to undertaken courses/opportunities
- Support for carers and children who are worried about what will happen if the grandparent carer passes away
- Support to manage parental issues such as addiction, mental health to minimise impact on the children
- Support for children to improve their relationships with wider family and locate family members
- Improved recognition and understanding of kinship carer trauma
- Support to maintain connections with parent in jail

Formal arrangements and partnerships to support kinship carers

- Establish partnerships with corporate/banking sector to set up no or low cost loans for kinship carers to enable home extensions, bigger vehicle, relevant courses etc, (?NSW is thought to have a program) +++
- Establish partnerships with the housing sector re easier access to rental properties (similar to arrangements made in the Family and Domestic Violence sector), etc

Informal carers need to access supports +

- Children should not have to come into care to receive supports (many people only in statutory system in order to receive legal and financial support) +
- unsupported child payment (NZ model)+ or ?double orphan pension +
- informal carers to have access to same training as other kinship carers
- integrated system that supports both formal and informal carer types
- equitable supports for all carers
- support for all informal carers not just grandparents
- Universally accepted statutory declaration for kinship carers to assist when parent/guardian consent is required but unable to be obtained eg for education, health, Centrelink etc
- could have a special guardianship order for kin carers who need the support of a legal framework

Research

- models of kinship care support, how support is provided in other jurisdictions eg through the school system
- Ask all Service Centres and NGOs what they are doing to support kinship carers as there is likely innovative local practice occurring
- Review intersection with Family Court for potential opportunities

Improved communication between carer and care team/other stakeholders

- more flexibility in communication/contact eg use of technology
- NGO access to enter information to departmental system (without compromising confidentiality)

Access to information +

- Kinship carer helpline (telephone, on line and face to face) – ability to direct you to the correct place for assistance, assisted referrals for other supports etc +
- QFKC website, Child Safety website
- kinship carer app for phone with all links to information and resources, hard copies of info handbook for those without internet access
- simplified processes

Federal level Centrelink – gaps in current system

- Change name from “Grandparent” to recognise all kinship carers are able to be supported through this service
- Equitable financial support, not means tested
- Carer payments for all kinship carers through DHS +
- Improve access / navigation of system

Data gaps ++

- All data to enable view for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous kinship care families and children
- Permanent care orders – how many to kinship carers
- How many families are caring for relative children informally +
- Census data limited, could improve

Departmental processes for statutory kinship carers

- Delegate to Child Safety Officer things like approval for school excursions to reduce the delay in receiving approvals +
- More leniency in criminal history for kin (where no current safety issues)
- Inclusion of child and carer in care team processes
- Provision of relevant cultural information to carers
- Maintain focus on relationships/connections (difficult with high demand and staffing turnover)
- Increase Child Safety Officer stability (less short term contracts)
- Increase consistency of practice across the state, particularly with regard to resources for kinship care families eg larger vehicles
- Case transfers to happen immediately not months/years
- Relationship issues between carers and Child Safety
- Difficulties with overseas travel requirements
- Challenges with arranging natural respite with family/friends as it is limited to 48 hours
- Higher needs of children to be recognised
- Financial stress not always understood by Child Safety
- Difficulty with court decisions which appear to be against children's wishes

Final feedback session (information shared back to the big group)

Concerns

- Kinship carers taking on a new baby may experience difficulties with eligibility in accessing parental leave entitlements available to new parents
- Difficulty in accessing information, not readily available, difficulty identifying resources and services and eligibility
- Interactions between state, federal and non-government systems is not streamlined
- Limited services and supports in the regions
- More attention and resources is given to tertiary responses, not prevention and early intervention
- Lack of data about the extent of informal kinship care
- Lack of voice for kinship carers
- Inconsistent definitions, terminology and responses across the states
- Systemic issues eg bluecards
- Current system has not kept pace with contemporary lifestyles eg visits by departmental and NGO staff and community visitors as well as training are offered during the week when many carers work
- Delays in identifying kin and delays in initial approval
- Limited consistency in practice around family mapping and family finding
- Financial resourcing does not cover costs, particularly if needing to upgrade accommodation or vehicle

Opportunities

- National Framework for protecting Australia's children (Council of Australian Governments COAG), next stage being developed, opportunity to get kinship care on the national agenda
- Opportunities from Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse recommendations specifically relating to kinship care

Recommendation 12.8

Each state and territory government should adopt a model of assessment appropriately tailored for kinship/relative care. This type of assessment should be designed to:

- a. better identify the strengths as well as the support and training needs of kinship/relative carers
- b. ensure holistic approaches to supporting placements that are culturally safe
- c. include appropriately resourced support plans.

Recommendation 12.17

Each state and territory government should ensure that:

- a. the financial support and training provided to kinship/relative carers is equivalent to that provided to foster carers
 - b. the need for any additional supports are identified during kinship/relative carer assessments and are funded
 - c. additional casework support is provided to maintain birth family relationships.
- Five elements of the child placement principle were enshrined in Qld legislation late 2018, prioritising the rights for children to grow up in family, community and culture
 - Qld Human Rights Act, thinking from a child rights perspective, right of children in kinship care to receive the services they need
 - Qld current legislative reforms of the Child Protection Act, the department is considering a broader purpose for the Act, including wellbeing (not just protecting children), which fits for kinship care
 - Qld Govt Supporting Families Changing Futures – new plan for second half of the 10 year Family support / Child Protection reform process – one of the key focus areas is redesigning the placement and care system overall to better meet the complex needs of children in care, and alongside this is a commitment to better assistance and support for carers.
 - Current departmental review (being undertaken by Paul Testro Consulting and Encompass Family and Community) of assessment and training for foster and kinship carers, opportunity to highlight differences and specific needs of kinship carers
 - Provisional carer assessment processes should be flexible enough to ensure risk assessment as well as ensure a child does not have to go to an unknown carer
 - Not a reduction in standards for kinship care, but a different approach
 - It might be possible to enhance the functions of the existing departmental foster and kinship care support line which operates through the After Hours service

Potential actions to improve the experience of kinship care families

- Support a national approach to kinship care, as separate and distinct from foster care
 - National data collection
 - Consistent definitions and terminology
 - Kinship carer one stop shop for all information and resources
 - Equity in financial and other support for all kinship carers (formal and informal)
- Recognise the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship carers
- Ensure the application of the five elements of the child placement principle for all decisions relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations to support kinship care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- Change the model of statutory kinship care to be focused on family support for carers, children and other family members
- Develop an initial package of information, recourses and a point of contact to provide kinship carers at the time of placement
- 24/7 access to support
- Develop relationships with the corporate sector (similar to those done to support survivors of family and domestic violence and those done to better manage issues related to youth offending). This could include the finance/banking sector re developing low/no cost loans for kinship carers, the housing sector to develop processes to support carers with access to rental properties etc
- Review practice associated with family mapping and family finding
- Resource and support more kinship care support groups, particularly recognising regional needs