

**Opening statement by Mr Lindsay Wegener, Executive Director, PeakCare Queensland Inc. (PeakCare)
at hearing held in Brisbane on 5th April 2016**

PeakCare is a peak body for child and family services in Queensland. Across Queensland, PeakCare has 61 members, which are a mix of small, medium and large, local and statewide, mainstream and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander non-government organisations that provide family support, child protection, and out-of-home care services (such as foster and kinship care and residential care) to children and young people who are at risk of entry to or in the statutory child protection system, and their families. In addition, PeakCare's membership includes a network of 26 individual members and other entities supportive of PeakCare's policy platform about the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, and the support of their families.

PeakCare has a longstanding interest in promoting a better understanding and management of the intersection between the child protection system and other systems that provide human services. This includes, for example, the intersection between child protection and domestic and family violence, disability services, youth justice, health and mental health services for both adults and children, and education. In respect of our interest in the intersection between child protection and education, PeakCare has in recent years organised and facilitated a number of seminars about supporting the learning and educational needs of at risk and in care children and young people, in partnership with the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak. To date, these seminars have been held at Logan City in October 2014, at Townsville in December 2014 and Rockhampton in August 2015.

The seminars have incorporated 'guest speaker' presentations and panel-led discussions about research, relevant government policies and local initiatives. Presenters and panel members have included a mix of senior representatives from the Queensland Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, Department of Education and Training including school principals, private education providers and non-government organisations involved in providing out-of-home care services.

The purposes of the seminars have been to share information amongst the seminar participants, explore promising initiatives and promote enhanced collaboration across the child protection and education sectors at a local level.

In 2015, PeakCare was contracted by the Queensland Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services to develop a trauma-informed therapeutic framework for the residential care of children and young people in Queensland. This project arose out of a recommendation – recommendation 8.7 – of the recent Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry which stated:

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The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services partner with non-government service providers to develop a trauma-informed therapeutic framework for residential care facilities, supported by joint training programs and professional development initiatives.

During the course of conducting this project, extensive consultation was undertaken with non-government and government organisations including the Department of Education and Training. Four regional workshops were conducted and attended by representatives from the Department of Education and Training amongst others and specific consultation meetings were conducted with personnel from the Department of Education and Training and opportunity provided for this department to provide feedback and comment on the framework proposed by PeakCare.

The project was commenced in March 2015 and was concluded on 31st August 2015 at which time PeakCare provided a final report of the project to the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services along with two attachments – the first of which described the framework proposed by PeakCare, which was given the title *Hope and Healing Framework* for residential care and the second of which described issues that would need to be addressed in implementing the framework.

PeakCare is very clear that the proposed *Hope and Healing Framework* cannot be successfully implemented by non-government residential care providers operating in isolation from other non-government and government service providers whose areas of responsibility impact the nature and quality of the out-of-home care being provided to children and young people. The *Hope and Healing Framework* is best regarded as a ‘whole-of-system’ framework and one that should underpin and guide not only the work of non-government residential care providers, but also those organisations with which these services interact on a daily basis including, in particular, schools and other education providers. To this end, a section of the attachment to the report that addresses implementation issues makes note of a range of matters to be addressed with the Queensland departments responsible for health and education.

During the course of facilitating the aforementioned seminars about supporting the learning and education needs of children at risk and in care and the consultation exercises undertaken in developing the proposed *Hope and Healing Framework* for residential care, high levels of goodwill, dedication and commitment by schools towards delivering educational services that are better tailored to the needs of children and young people in care were apparent. What was also apparent however was the level of resourcing needed to ensure that children and young people who have experienced the trauma of abuse and/or neglect along with the trauma of being brought into care have access to teachers and guidance officer who have received specialised training about the impact of trauma and trauma-informed teaching practices and

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access to adequate numbers of trained teacher-aides and other support staff able to provide individualised assistance to these children.

A good quality education is a key determinant of a child or young person's future life opportunities. This is never more pronounced than when we are thinking about children and young people who face, for example, physical, emotional, developmental, cognitive, social, locational, economic or other barriers to accessing and enjoying a stable learning and school environment. These barriers are located at the individual child, system and structural levels. Adequate resourcing and sufficient flexibility are essential in meeting individual children and young people's needs and enabling every child to reach their potential. This applies to classrooms and the broader school environment in the context of education systems.

There is much evidence that has been presented to this committee within written submissions about poorer educational achievement, participation and retention of children and young people who are subject to statutory child protection intervention, compared with the general population. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children generally and for those who are in State care, educational outcomes are even poorer than for other children.

Across Queensland, there were 8,448 children and young people in out-of-home care at 30 June 2015 and over 40% of these children are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Many of the children living in out-of-home care have disabilities, most have experienced significant trauma prior to entering care, and most display a range of complex and challenging behaviours. While the Queensland state government agencies with responsibility for child protection and education give coordinated attention to addressing the learning and educational needs of these children and young people, available resources and efforts are limited, stretched and inconsistent across the various geographic areas.

The Gonski reforms are about getting the match right between school resources and the individual needs of that school's students. Getting the right match will help all students, and particularly those children and young people who need specialist assistance, differently trained teaching personnel or behaviour support programs, to get a good educational start in life.

The impact of the budget cuts announced in the 2014-15 Commonwealth Budget will have a significant detrimental effect on children's educational and therefore life experiences and opportunities. PeakCare contends that the Gonski reforms are much needed. Schools and school communities assert that Gonski funding is making a difference. Not following through on the planned funding means that issues identified as being at the heart of driving poor educational outcomes will continue unabated.

Thank you for the opportunity to present PeakCare's views to this committee.

