



Munro Campaign

Marilyn Monroe (1926-1962) was one of the most celebrated actresses of all time. Born Norma Jeanne Mortenson, she was almost smothered to death at the age of two, sexually assaulted at the age of six and spent most of her childhood in a sequence of foster homes and orphanages. At the age of 36, she was found dead of an overdose that was adjudged "probable suicide".

The Munro Report is not about Marilyn Monroe's tragic life, or is it? Perhaps a more purposeful and better functioning child protection system during the period of her childhood may have prevented at least some of the sadness of her life that was tragically cut short. Whilst too late for Ms Monroe, perhaps the lessons to be learned from the recently completed Munro Review of the United Kingdom's child protection system will help to prevent much of the sadness experienced now and in the future by other children, young people and families.

PeakCare's Munro Campaign

In June 2011, PeakCare Queensland initiated our “Munro Campaign” for purposes of engaging our Member Agencies and other interested parties in an examination of a review of the United Kingdom’s child protection system recently completed by Professor Eileen Munro.

Through this Campaign, PeakCare has set about inviting organisations and individuals to consider “*what the British Bull Dog had in common with the Queensland Koala*” – what findings, if any, of the Munro Review might be of relevance to Queensland, what lessons might be learned from the Munro Review about ways in which Queensland’s child protection systems, policies and practice can be improved.



About the UK Munro Review

The UK Munro Review was commenced in June 2010 and completed in three stages.

Professor Munro’s first report that was published in October 2010, provided an analysis about why problems had come about in the UK’s child protection system and why many of the reforms that had been previously attempted had unforeseen, negative consequences. Her second report released in February 2011 considered a “child’s journey through the child protection system” – from a starting point of “needing help” to an end point of “receiving help”. In her third and final report, called “A child-centred system”, Professor Munro built on the findings of her initial reports to make recommendations aimed at creating long-term change with a range of fundamental shifts in the ways in which the UK’s child protection systems works.

Professor Munro proposed reforms which, taken

together, are intended to create the conditions that enable professionals to make the best judgements about the help to be given to children, young people and families.

Key themes of her recommendations concerned the development of a system that:

- values professional expertise
- clarifies accountabilities and improves learning
- shares responsibility for the provision of early help
- develops social work expertise, and
- creates an organisational context that supports effective social work practice.

About our Campaign Strategies

PeakCare has made use of Our Practice Blogs, Facebook and web-site to facilitate a shared exploration of the implications of the Munro Report.

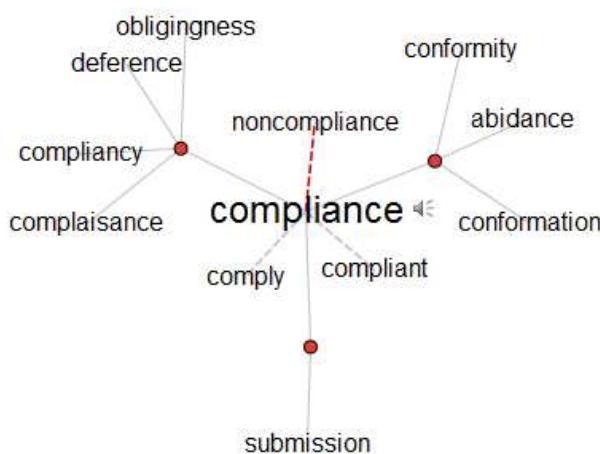
The following is a series of excerpts from blogs posted by PeakCare about key themes of the Munro Review.

You can access these posts and add your comments by going to the PeakCare website (<http://www.peakcare.org.au/>) and clicking on the *Professional Practice Blogs* link.

These posts may be regarded as a forerunner to face-to-face discussions about the Munro Review and its implications for Queensland that PeakCare will be facilitating during 2012.

Compliance versus Learning

The UK Munro Review found that the “demands of bureaucracy” had become so great that the capacity of child protection organisations and their staff to work directly with children and families was being hindered. Practitioners and managers told the review that the demands of observing statutory guidelines, meeting targets and adhering to “local rules” had become so extensive that their ability to stay “child-centred” was compromised. In addition, complaints were received that, in becoming “so standardised” through the requirement to comply with these guidelines, targets and rules, UK services were no longer able to provide the range of responses needed to respond to the variety of needs with which children and families often present.



In response to these concerns, the Munro Review recommended a “radical shift” away from a “central prescription” of statutory guidelines, targets and rules towards helping child protection professionals exercise “more freedom” in making use of their professional expertise in assessing need and providing the “right help”. In place of “unnecessary or unhelpful prescription”, the Munro Review recommended that this be replaced by a focus on firstly, only the “essential rules” that enable multiple agencies to work together effectively and secondly, the “principles that underpin good practice”.

Professor Munro noted that these recommended actions were necessary to move the UK child protection system away from being a “compliance culture” towards becoming a “learning culture”.

Questions to consider

1. Has Queensland’s child protection system become overly standardised through compliance with guidelines, targets and rules in ways that now limit the capacity of services to provide the range of responses needed to address the variety of needs with which child and families often present?
2. Have the “demands of bureaucracy” compromised capacity to stay “child-centred”?
3. If so, are these features of Government child protection services only or do they also apply to non-Government services?
4. How would you describe the culture of Queensland’s child protection system – as a “compliance culture” or as a “learning culture”?
5. Is this a description that applies to the child protection system generally or is it one that is confined to your organisation only or maybe a bit of both?

Is the Tail Wagging Queensland's Child Protection System?

Let's think about key features of the UK's child protection system that were criticised in the Munro Review and how closely they resemble the image of "*a tail wagging its dog*". Then let's think about Queensland's child protection system and ask ourselves, "*Is the dog still wagging its tail or has the tail taken over?*"

Key features of the UK's child protection system noted by Professor Munro included an over-reliance on "compliance" in place of valuing and promoting "professional expertise" in ensuring good child protection practice.

Importantly, the Munro Review did *not* recommend a complete abandonment of all systems and processes that are in place to guide, monitor and evaluate the quality of the UK's child protection services. Rather, Professor Munro recommended a radical reduction in the number of centrally prescribed "rules" and their replacement with "essential rules" only – rules that are essential in allowing organisations to work effectively together. Her recommendation was that, instead of "procedures" driving practice, there be a shift in focus towards a more active observance of the "principles that underpin good practice".

Within Queensland, both Government and non-Government organisations operate in a regulated environment. For example, non-Government organisations providing out-of-home care services must be licensed and demonstrate their compliance with certain service standards. Non-Government organisations that are Government funded are generally required to regularly report on their performance in delivering defined outputs and achieving certain targets.

If we were to track back in time, some good reasons can be found explaining why certain systems and processes were established in Queensland for ensuring the quality of services that children, young people and families are entitled to receive.

For example, the system of licensing out-of-home care services arose out of recommendations contained within the 1998-99 Forde Inquiry into the Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions – this Inquiry having discovered a significant lack of accountability and consistency in relation to the quality of services being provided for children and young people living in out-of-home care. Perhaps it is a question of not 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater'.



Questions to consider

- Has Queensland "over-regulated" our child protection system?
- Do we, like the United Kingdom, have too many statutory guidelines, targets and rules?
- Do these guidelines, targets and rules support and assist good child protection practice or are they distractions from, or perhaps a substitute for, the exercise of professional expertise and judgement that is now in short supply?

Warning! Remove the scaffolding with care

Interestingly, those responsible for implementing recommendations of the Munro Review within the UK are now concerned that when shifting away from an over-reliance on “guidelines, targets and rules” that they not “kick away the scaffolding” without safe transition plans in place.

Minutes of the Munro Review Implementation Working Group, refer to the need for discretion and control to be given to professionals at the ‘sharp end’. The working group pondered whether the UK system has the calibre of professionals to deal with the reduction in ‘scaffolding’. The group identified the need for an exploration of opportunities for the early alignment of training for social workers and health professionals, not just

joint training once qualified. There was also recognition that high academic achievement did not necessarily make individuals good at working with children and families.

Munro’s report recommended that increased focus be placed on the identification of professional capabilities relating to knowledge, critical reflection, intervention and skills. With these questions in mind, the Working Group recognises that reforms need to be gradually introduced. This is in line with recommendations made by Professor Munro when she stated that additional resources would be required to develop the additional expertise and training necessary to set the profession off “on a new path”.

Questions to consider

- If Queensland were to reduce our reliance on the various guidelines, targets and rules that we have in place to ensure service quality, might we similarly be at risk of kicking away some necessary scaffolding?
- If we were to reduce our reliance on “procedure”, do we have the level of “professional expertise” needed to fill the gap?

How do we assess quality services?

Professor Munro did not recommend the removal of all frameworks and systems for managing and monitoring service quality in the UK.

What she recommended however was a shift in focus away from “compliance” to what “really matters” – that being, whether or not children and families are actually being helped.

In particular, Professor Munro recommended that the system of scheduled “inspections” that are conducted in the UK be replaced with inspections conducted on an “unannounced basis” to reduce the administrative and bureaucratic burden currently involved in preparing for an inspection.

Questions to consider

- What might it be like within Queensland if, in place of “planned external evaluations” of care services, these were replaced by “unplanned inspections or assessments”?
- Could this be managed in ways that reduce the bureaucratic burden of preparing for evaluations?
- Would “unplanned inspections or assessments” provide a better picture of the true quality of services being provided to children, young people and families?

It's all about the sum of the parts, isn't it?

Amongst the range of changes to be made to the UK's child protection system, Professor Munro recommended that there be a shift away from conducting inspections of individual organisations to police their compliance with various guidelines, rules and performance measures.

In place of this, she recommended that an inspection system be created that allows for an examination of the contributions being collectively made by all key services in achieving an effective child protection system at a local level.

Professor Munro noted that this should include an examination of the contributions being made by local health services, education, police and the justice system to the creation and maintenance of an effective child protection system.

According to Professor Munro, if "rules" are to exist, those that should be focussed upon are those that are developed to ensure that organisations are effectively



Questions to consider

- Can you imagine what it would look like if a similar shift in approach was to occur within Queensland?
- For example, what would it be like if, in place of evaluating the compliance of individual non-Government organisations with the outputs stipulated in their "service agreements", there was a shift towards regularly assessing the contributions being made by all key services – both Government and non-Government owned – to the achievement of agreed-upon outcomes being sought for children, young people and families within a particular community?
- What would it look like if the approach taken to the assessment of services in relation to their licence applications was changed to also incorporate an evaluation of the collaborative performance of Government organisations (such as Child Safety Service Centres, Youth Justice Services, public health and education services) in meeting the requirements established by licensing?
- How could these approaches be best managed in ways that promote a shared "learning culture" in preference to a "compliance culture"?

Do tools rule?

The Munro Review promotes a vision for “child-centred” practice where professional expertise in individualising the services to be provided to children, young people and families is properly valued.

Underpinning the reforms recommended by Professor Munro were concerns about the UK’s use of “one-size-fits-all” approaches to the delivery of child protection services. In particular, this included concerns about an overly rigid and routine use of electronic assessment tools as a substitute for the exercise of professional judgement and decision-making. This can be seen as symptomatic of the concerns about “procedure driving practice” in place of “good practice” remaining in charge.



Concerns about the application of standardised approaches to the assessment of children and families’ needs including, in particular, the use of “electronic assessment tools”, are not confined to the United Kingdom. Research in Queensland has found that, rather than assisting the process of decision-making, the tools are often completed in retrospect to match the outcome that had already been determined. Practitioners are often critical of tools “over-simplifying” and failing to deal with the complexities of casework. Tools have been viewed as an “administrative burden” that were being chiefly used for the purpose of ensuring accountability for decision-making, rather than as an aid in assisting appropriate decisions being made.

You may like to read and consider the [Gillingham and Humphreys \(2010\) report](#) on the use of “Structure Decision-Making (SDM) Tools” in Queensland.

Questions to consider

- What are your thoughts about the concerns raised by the Munro Review and the Gillingham and Humphreys research in relation to current use of the Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools in Queensland?
- Do the findings of the Gillingham and Humphreys report match or differ from your observations and experiences in relation to ways in which the SDM tools are currently being used?
- If you have concerns about the SDM tools, are they about the design of the tools or about the ways in which the tools are being used?

Prevention better than cure

The Munro Review noted the growing body of evidence of the effectiveness of early intervention with children and families and identified the importance of providing such help. Professor Munro stated that preventative services can do more to reduce abuse and neglect than reactive services.

As many services and professions have a role in helping children and families, the co-ordination of their work was viewed as important in reducing “inefficiencies and omissions”.

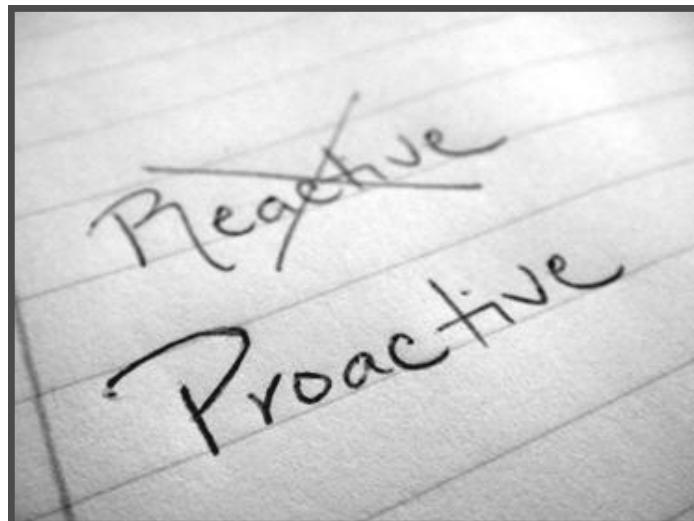
Professor Munro noted the importance of the Government placing a duty on local authorities and their statutory partners to secure the sufficient provision of local “early help services” for children, young people and families.

This shared responsibility should lead to the identification of the early help that is needed by a particular child and their family and to the provision of an offer of help where their needs do not match the criteria for receiving tertiary services.

Professor Munro emphasised that good mechanisms are needed to help identify those children and young people who are suffering or likely to suffer, harm from abuse or neglect.

The association between child abuse and neglect and parental problems, such as poor mental health, domestic violence and substance misuse, was noted to be well established. It was also noted by Professor Munro that it is “not easy to identify abuse and neglect” - signs and symptoms are often ambiguous and it is therefore important that those

working with children, young people and adults have ready access to high-level expertise for purposes of discussing concerns and deciding a course of action.



Questions to consider

- Does Queensland provide adequate prevention and early intervention services to children, young people and families?
- Where prevention and early intervention services are being delivered, are these services adequately coordinated?
- Do staff working in Government and non-Government services have access to expertise in discussing identified concerns and referral pathways when working with children, young people and families?