

Foundations of the future - building a workforce that cares, connects and evolves



**Queensland Residential
Care Workforce Strategy**



Acknowledgments of First Nations Peoples

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this country and recognise their enduring connection to land, wind, water and community. We pay our respect to Elders past and present, and to emerging leaders who carry forward the strength, wisdom, and resilience of their ancestors.

We recognise that First Nations peoples have cared for children and young people, families and communities for tens of thousands of years. Their knowledge systems, cultural practices and relational ways of being continue to shape and enrich the work of care today.

This Strategy affirms a commitment to cultural safety, truth-telling, and self-determination. We acknowledge the ongoing impacts of colonisation, intergenerational trauma and systemic injustice, and we uphold our responsibility to walk alongside First Nations peoples in building a future where all children and young people are safe, connected, and strong in identity.

We are deeply grateful to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, workers, families and communities who contributed their voices, insights, and cultural knowledge to the development of this Strategy. Your guidance strengthens our collective vision and reminds us that healing and hope begin with respect, relationship, and recognition.

This Strategy is designed to complement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisation (ATSICCO) Workforce Strategy, developed by Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP). QATSICPP's strategy, and its implementation plan, provide a roadmap to grow a strong, skilled and culturally led child and family services workforce, guided by the aspirations of ATSICCOs and informed by extensive community consultation.

This Strategy was developed by PeakCare Queensland, with funding provided by the Queensland Government. The Queensland Government's support enabled a collaborative process informed by the voices and experiences of residential care workers, children and young people, sector partners, parents and academics.

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Using this strategy

The **Foundations of the future – building a workforce that cares, connects and evolves** is more than a workforce strategy, it is a cultural blueprint. It acts as a values-based handbook for how we show up, support one another and walk alongside children and young people in residential care.

This cultural blueprint is intended to serve as a practical guide for all stakeholders, and invites residential care workers, leaders, policymakers, educators and community members to align their efforts and move forward together. This blueprint offers a shared vision grounded in dignity, connection, cultural safety and hope, providing a strong foundation for collaborative action and meaningful change.

Informed by lived experience and co-designed with voices across the sector, the Strategy outlines not just what needs to change, but how we change together. It defines the behaviours, mindsets and relational practices that create safe and stable environments. It reinforces that the culture we build as a workforce directly shapes the care experiences of children and young people.

This document is designed for everyday use. It can inform individual reflection, team conversations, supervision sessions, training, recruitment, leadership development, organisational planning and government activities. Structured around key priority areas and outcomes, it provides clear guidance on how to align actions with values at every level of the system.

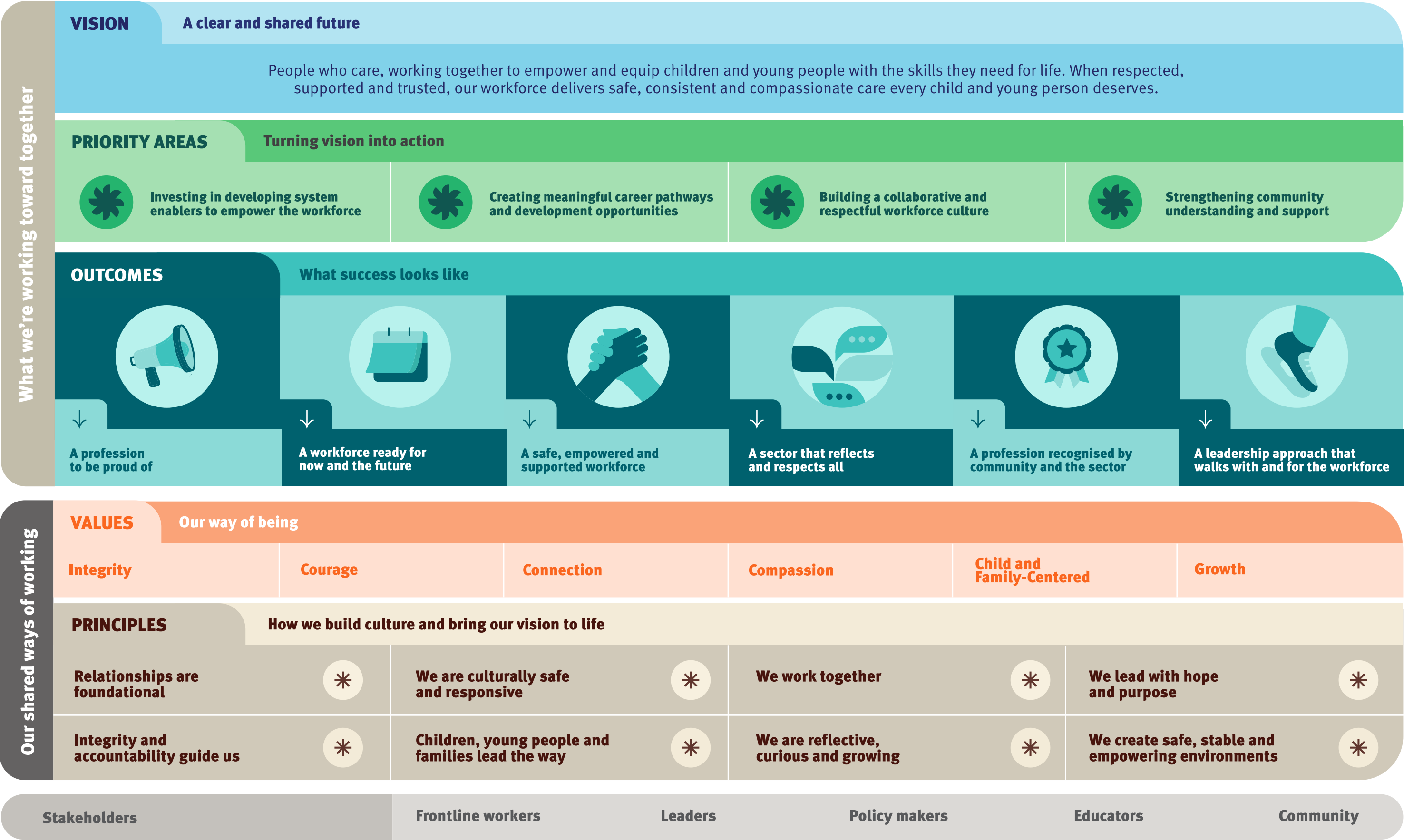
As much a strategy as it is a culture handbook, this document holds a shared language, a collective purpose and outcome areas that reflect what it means to be part of a profession that is not only skilled, but deeply human. It encourages reflection, accountability and pride so that every worker can feel supported, empowered, included and part of something bigger.

We encourage you to return to this Strategy often. Read it not just for direction, but for inspiration. Use it as a guide to align your practice, shape your team culture and contribute to a workforce that is responsive, relational and resilient. Whether you're a frontline worker, a manager, a trainer or a policy maker, this Strategy is yours to carry forward so that together, we build the future of residential care.



As much a strategy as it is a culture handbook, this document is designed to be used as a guide to align your practice, shape your team culture and contribute to a workforce that is responsive, relational and resilient.

Our strategy on a page





Tom Allsop
Chief Executive Officer
PeakCare Queensland

Foreword

Queensland’s residential care workforce plays a vital role in safeguarding the rights, wellbeing and futures of children and young people who cannot live safely at home.

This work is demanding. It is relational, often unpredictable, and shaped by the complex needs of those it seeks to support. The individuals who carry out this work on the floor, in teams, in leadership and in community do so with skill, commitment and courage. However, this workforce often feels undervalued, fragmented and under-supported.

Foundations of the Future: Queensland Residential Care Workforce Strategy seeks to change that. It offers a coherent, values-led vision for a workforce that is recognised, resourced and empowered. It acknowledges the complexity of the system in which residential care operates, while putting forward a hopeful, practical and unifying pathway toward a stronger future. This Strategy makes clear that strengthening the workforce is imperative to improving the standard of care for children and young people.

This Strategy has been developed during a period of significant reform. The Queensland Child Safety Commission of Inquiry and other system reviews have cast a spotlight on the urgent need for transformation in child protection and out-of-home care. This Strategy does not replace that work, it complements it. It provides a foundation from which residential care services, government, educators, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, and the broader community can align and invest in the people at the heart of residential care.

The creation of this Strategy was undertaken in partnership with Social Vantage Advisory, and I wish to particularly acknowledge the outstanding contributions of Andrea Lauchs, Sammy Bruderer and Lauren Sullivan. Their leadership, sector expertise and deep understanding of residential care brought integrity, clarity and heart to this process. They not only facilitated meaningful engagement across diverse stakeholder groups but translated complex insights into a cohesive and aspirational Strategy that captures both the challenges and the possibilities

ahead. Their stewardship has meant that the voices of workers, young people, families and service providers were not only heard, but honoured.

The Strategy was shaped by more than 200 contributors from over 150 organisations across Queensland. We are grateful to the residential care workers who shared their experiences with such honesty and passion. You named the challenges, described the moments of pride and pain, and offered a powerful, vision of what’s possible when care is built on trust and respect. To the young people and families who brought insight, courage and truth, we thank you. Your perspectives shaped not only the priorities of this Strategy, but its tone, its purpose and its commitment to doing better. To sector leaders, peak bodies, cultural advisors, educators and government representatives, your collaboration has built a shared vision that will continue to guide our collective efforts.

I also extend my thanks to the Catalyst for Care Reference Group and Program Board Members, whose guidance and oversight have been essential throughout the development of this document.

Foundations of the Future is more than a workforce plan. It is a cultural blueprint for how we show up in this work for each other and for the children and young people we walk alongside. It invites reflect, action and accountability. It offers a common language and direction for those committed to building a more responsive, relational and resilient residential care system.

This is a strategy we share with the sector, with community, and most importantly, with the children and young people whose lives it seeks to support.

Sector voices: These sentiments capture the collective voice of the sector, reflecting the strength and passion that is present, and equally, the complexities that surround supporting children and young people in residential care.

“We need a plan, not just hope that more workers will show up.” **Brisbane**

“We’re not just youth workers — we’re the people who keep showing up.” **Innisfail**

“Community perception is misinformed at the moment – negative stories are spread on social media.” **Logan**

“If our staff are not empowered and pushed to learn and develop, then they can’t be the person to role model that to the young people.” **Mackay**

“We need to feel safe in the team, in the organisation, and in the home.” **Ipswich**

“It’s a lot easier when you have a consistent core team – you notice the change in the kids when you have workers coming and going.” **Gold Coast**

“Sleepovers are really hard, I can’t sleep.” **Toowoomba**

“If we’re not supported ourselves, how can we support them?” **Kingaroy**

“I feel like a lot of the people who I talk to think that I’m a babysitter” **Gold Coast**

“The public doesn’t understand our role. They just see the chaos, not the care.” **Caboolture**

“We talk about qualifications but it’s also about the values and the attributes of what we do.” **Gold Coast**

“You feel like you’re doing something that actually matters.” **Kingaroy**

“I came into it wanting to make a difference.” **Kingaroy**

“I love what I do, but I know that people don’t understand what I do.” **Toowoomba**

“I love coming back to the kids when they’re so excited to see you.” **Kingaroy**

“It’s hard to improve what we can’t see.” **Brisbane**

“Voice of workers needs to be valued more – they spend the most time with the young people.” **Logan**

“I feel more confident when I know there’s someone I can turn to for guidance.” **Kingaroy**

“There is shame and stigma associated with young people and the workers.” **Mackay**

“Lots of youth workers don’t feel like they have a voice.” **Ipswich**

“We need the sector to be proactive rather than reactive.” **Innisfail**

“Peer support is too rare and only happens occasionally – we are mostly alone.” **Toowoomba**

“There is shame and stigma associated with young people and the workers.” **Mackay**

Helena Wright
Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Policy and Strategy
QATSICPP

A message from QATSICPP

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, safety, healing and belonging are found in culture, kinship and connection to Country.

A strong and supported residential care workforce can help nurture those connections, not by standing in place of family or culture, but by walking alongside them with deep respect.

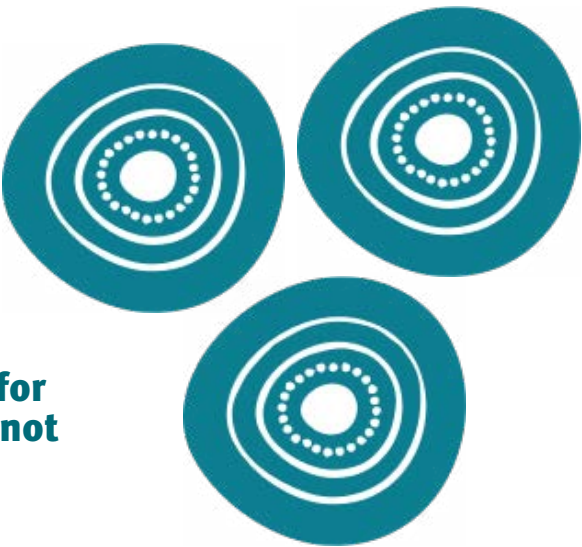
This Strategy affirms what our communities have long known - that healing cannot happen without relationship, and that the presence of safe, culturally capable adults is essential to the wellbeing of our children. We acknowledge the residential care workers who strive every day to show up with heart, to listen more than they speak, and to honour the cultural identity of the children in their care.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are overrepresented in residential care. This is not just a statistic, it is the legacy of colonisation, of systemic racism and of policies that have too often excluded, punished or misunderstood our families. This Strategy presents an opportunity for change, a way to centre cultural safety not as an add-on, but as core business.

We call for a workforce that is reflective, informed by cultural knowledge, and guided by First Nations leadership at every level. One that sees our children not as broken, but as whole, as future leaders, with their own aspirations, and one that knows the power of walking with Elders, listening to community, and holding space for truth-telling.

QATSICPP stands ready to support the implementation of this Strategy through the parallel QATSICPP Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Child Protection Workforce Strategy. Together, these frameworks can help ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in residential care are supported by adults who are not only skilled, but culturally grounded and committed to their right to grow up safe, connected and proud.

We look forward to a future where every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child in care is surrounded by a workforce that walks with them, not ahead of them, not in place of family, but beside them, with care, integrity, cultural humility and hope.



This Strategy presents an opportunity for change, a way to centre cultural safety not as an add-on, but as core business.

Written by Nel Monssen with and on behalf of young people with lived experience in Queensland's child protection system.

What a good residential worker looks like to a young person?

I was in care. I've seen the good, the bad and everything in between. I've had workers who made me feel like just another shift, and I've had a few who made me feel human.

This Strategy? It gives me hope that the care we have talked about when creating the workplace strategy becomes the care we actually live.

What young people in care want is simple - people who care enough to stay. People who don't judge us by what's in our files or case notes. People who are consistent, calm and who show up even when we are not easy to be around. We want workers who are real, who talk to us like equals, and who actually listen.

"The best worker I even had didn't try to fix me, she just made me feel like I mattered"
- Young person, aged 17

There's a lot of talk in the system about behaviour management, risk, placements. But what we remember are the people who sat with us when we were angry, who helped us cook dinner, who celebrated our birthdays - even when we said we didn't want one. That's what makes a difference.

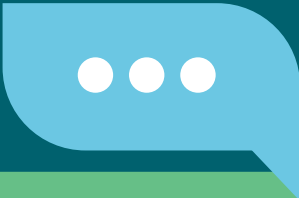
"Care shouldn't feel like a job. It should feel like someone actually gives a damn"
- Young person, aged 16

This Strategy recognises that residential care workers aren't just staff, they're the adults who many of us see more than anyone else. When they're supported, trained and respected, it shows. When they feel safe, we are more likely to feel safe too.

We don't need perfect workers. We need real ones. People who are honest, who follow through, and who believe we can do more than survive. We can grow, heal and lead full lives.

"I just needed one person to not give up on me. One person to see past the files"
- Young person, aged 18

If this Strategy helps build a workforce like that, then it is not just a plan, it is a chance. A chance to make residential care a place where young people can find stability, respect, and maybe even hope.



"My workers showed up every time they were meant to see me, ready to meet me where I was at that day regardless of what objectives or goals we may have set for that day- Young person, aged 20

Why this strategy, why now?



By setting a clear vision and outcomes, this Strategy can turn collective insight into collective action. It allows for accountability of progress and lays the foundation for the kind of system we want to build.



Context and understanding



From fragmentation to foundation



How we got here and where we're going



What this strategy means



Workforce trends and insights

From fragmentation to foundation: creating a cohesive strategy

Residential care in Queensland plays a vital role in the lives of children and young people who have experienced trauma, abuse and neglect. The workforce that supports them does so with compassion, resilience and deep commitment. But these efforts are often carried out in a fragmented system—one that is reactive rather than proactive, and too often shaped by crisis response rather than long-term vision.

Without a shared strategy, we risk reinforcing the very challenges we aim to resolve — staff turnover, inconsistent care, inadequate preparation and workforce burnout.

The purpose of this Strategy is to build and sustain a skilled, valued and resilient workforce that is supported to deliver safe, relational and trauma-informed care for children and young people.

It envisions a future where residential care workers are equipped with the training, supervision and resources they need to form meaningful relationships with children and young people, and where their knowledge is recognised, their wellbeing is prioritised and their voices are heard and valued.


This Strategy provides the direction and coherence needed to achieve this. It is a blueprint for a stronger, safer and more sustainable future — or the children and young people whose growth and development depend on the quality of that workforce.

This is not just a workforce issue; it is a child-centred issue. Children and young people need to be surrounded by a workforce and adults that are stable, skilled, culturally responsive and supported in their roles. This Strategy outlines system values and invests in the people who show up every day to care, advocate and walk alongside children and young people through some of the most difficult periods of their lives.

It provides a shared framework for government, service providers, educators and communities to act with greater alignment, clarity and purpose. It allows for proactive planning, evidence-informed investment and a sector-wide shift from compliance-driven practice, to care that prioritises relationships, reflection and respect.

By setting a clear vision and outcomes, this Strategy can turn collective insight into collective action. It allows for accountability of progress and lays the foundation for the kind of system we want to build. One that supports not only better care for children and young people, but better conditions for those who provide it.

This Strategy is our commitment to act, not just in response to what is wrong, but in pursuit of what is possible. At its core, it's about creating the conditions where residential care workers can thrive, so that children and young people can too.

A person with brown hair, wearing a dark blue hoodie and blue jeans, is sitting on a concrete ledge. They are wearing large, over-ear headphones and looking out over a city at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, pink, and purple. In the background, there are buildings and trees. The person is holding a smartphone in their right hand.

This Strategy is a blueprint for a stronger, safer and more sustainable future — not only for the residential care workforce, but for the children and young people whose growth and development depend on the quality of that workforce.

Supported, equals supportive. Our icon captures the inextricable link between a supported workforce and the delivery of consistent, supportive care for children and young people.



What this strategy means

More than a plan for workforce, this Strategy is a commitment to creating the conditions in which healing, stability and optimism are possible. Its impact will be felt across every part of the residential care ecosystem: by children and young people, workers, the sector as a whole and the communities they are part of.

While it does not prescribe specific commitments or fixed action plans, it offers a shared vision and unifying framework that can empower everyone to take steps aligned with the same goals, including workers, organisations, government, education providers and the wider community. It recognises the significant role that each stakeholder plays in shaping a residential care system where children and young people are supported by a capable, respected and adaptable workforce.



Improved + consistent care

For children and young people

This Strategy aims to improve experiences and outcomes by shaping a workforce that is skilled, stable and empowered to provide consistent, culturally responsive, inclusive and trauma-informed care. Children and young people should be surrounded by workers who are well-supported, well-trained and emotionally present, not just equipped to manage behaviour. When workers are skilled in building relationships and fostering growth, children and young people will feel safer, more seen and more hopeful about their futures. A strong workforce is necessary to building safe, trusting relationships that enable children and young people to heal, grow and thrive.



Recognition + support

For workers

This Strategy provides recognition of the complexity and importance of their roles. It articulates a clear ambition to elevate their role, both in how it is perceived and how it is supported. It offers guiding principles and outcome areas that highlight what a healthy, sustainable workforce could look like and how collective efforts can create safer, more supportive work environments.



Awareness + understanding

For the community

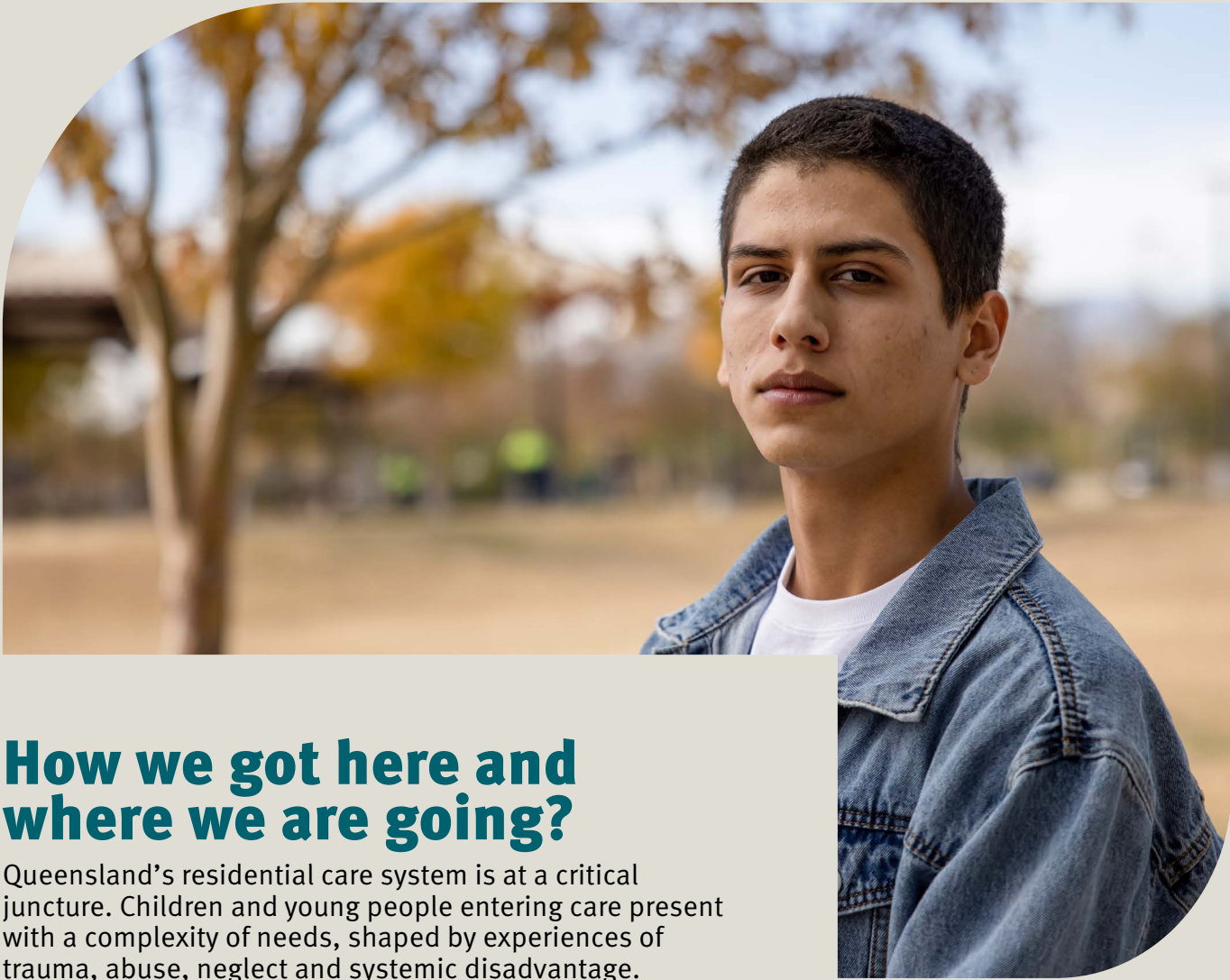
This Strategy reinforces the importance of understanding and respecting the role of the residential care workforce. It calls on the broader public to gain a more accurate and empathetic understanding of residential care and the children and young people it supports. This aims to encourage communities to recognise and value the workforce that guides and supports the children and young people in care.



Strategic focus + direction

For the sector

This Strategy highlights areas of focus that have emerged from consultations across the state and sets a direction for collaborative investment in capability, leadership, safety and diversity. It enables opportunities for providers to align their workforce strategies with a shared vision and supports coherence across service delivery, training and professional development. It promotes a culture of learning, collaboration and leadership, fostering innovation and raising the quality of residential care across Queensland.



How we got here and where we are going?

Queensland’s residential care system is at a critical juncture. Children and young people entering care present with a complexity of needs, shaped by experiences of trauma, abuse, neglect and systemic disadvantage.

There is a rising prevalence of harmful sexual behaviours, violent behaviours, and significant emotional and developmental challenges. The current workforce is dedicated and resilient but faces growing pressure to respond to these complexities in ways that promote growth, uphold safety and build positive futures. This Strategy recognises the urgent need to better support the workforce to meet both today’s needs and those we anticipate for the future.

Residential care must be a place where every child and young person can feel safe and thrive. Achieving this requires a workforce with the right capabilities, support structures, leadership and pathways for growth. Current approaches to recruitment, training, supervision and development must evolve to reflect contemporary best practice in trauma-informed, culturally safe, therapeutic care. Without targeted investment and reform, there is a risk of workforce

fatigue, staff turnover and inconsistent care, all of which directly impact the wellbeing of children and young people.

Insights shared throughout this Strategy are drawn directly from consultation workshops held with residential care workers, service providers, sector leaders, government representatives, peak bodies, support organisations, children and young people and families across Queensland. The voices of these stakeholders, their lived experiences, ideas and aspirations are woven throughout the Strategy, not only through direct quotes but also in how we frame priorities, define outcomes and describe the changes required. This Strategy reflects a strong sector consensus that workforce investment must be sustained, trauma-informed, culturally responsive and genuinely child-centred.

This Strategy also reflects insights from the recent *Residential Care Workforce*

Insights and Opportunities report. It aligns with activities already underway to improve workforce capability, leadership development, safeguarding practices and sector sustainability.

It focuses on the entire residential care workforce across Queensland, including frontline residential care workers, team leaders, supervisors, managers and the critical business support roles that enable effective service delivery. It sets out a blueprint for capability development, workforce planning, recruitment and retention, leadership pathways, cultural safety, wellbeing and continuous learning over the next five years.

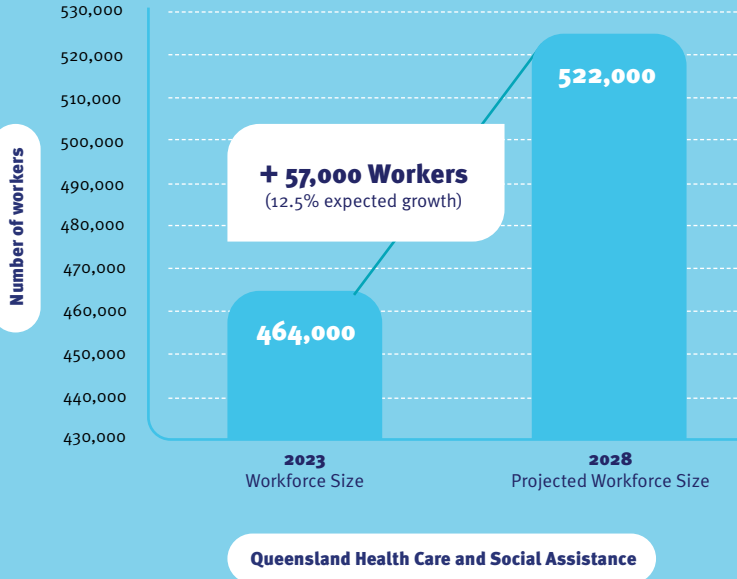
We must build a workforce that meets the needs of children and young people in care today, while also shaping the workforce we need for the future.

Workforce trends and insights

Projected workforce growth

Queensland’s residential care sector is poised for significant transformation over the next five years, underpinned by the rapid growth of the Health Care and Social Assistance industry, rising numbers of children and young people entering care and an increasing complexity in the support needs of those children and young people. These converging pressures point to an urgent and sustained demand for a residential care workforce.

The Health Care and Social Assistance industry is projected to be the fastest-growing in Queensland by 2028. According to projections from Jobs Queensland, this sector is expected to grow by more than 12.5% between 2023 and 2028, adding more than 57,000 workers across the state¹. This industry already represents the largest workforce in Queensland, employing approximately 464,000 people in 2023. By 2028, it is forecast to exceed 522,000 workers. Within this broader sector, occupations linked to youth residential care, such as residential care officers, youth workers, disability support workers and community services professionals, are projected to grow at or above the sector average due to increasing demand from government and non-government services.



“The Health Care and Social Assistance industry is mainly engaged in providing human health care and social assistance. It includes hospitals, medical and other care services (including allied health, ambulances and pathology), residential care services and social assistance services, such as child care, disabilities assistance, and welfare counselling services.”

– Jobs QLD, 2024

This projected growth is closely tied to escalating pressures in the child protection system. The number of children entering out-of-home care in Queensland has steadily increased over the past decade, with a 2023 Child Protection Australia report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) noting that Queensland consistently has one of the highest rates of children in care nationally². This is further compounded by a marked increase in children under the age of 12 in residential care, as well as children and young people living with disability or presenting with high levels of trauma-related behaviours³. These changes demand residential care workers have more advanced training, a deeper understanding of development, trauma and neurodiversity and the capacity and capability to respond with compassion and care to children and young people.

Minimum qualification standards for licensed service providers require that staff either hold, or be working toward, a

relevant Certificate IV qualification. While this implies a consistent level of care, it also perpetuates workforce supply challenges, particularly in rural and regional areas where access to training and ongoing supervision may be limited.

TAFE Queensland and private training organisations play a pivotal role in supporting workforce readiness in this sector. Enrollments in the Certificate IV in Child, Youth and Family Intervention and related community services qualifications have increased over time, aligning with government incentives such as Fee-Free TAFE. However, the completion rates of the Certificate IV and Diploma in Child, Youth and Family Intervention remain low, averaging only 20% between 2019 and 2023⁴. Data from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research also reveals that in 2023, 67.5% of enrolled students were aged between 25 and 49 years, 70.8% were female and 60.2% were enrolled at a private training organisation⁵.

Projected workforce growth cont...

Despite increased enrolments in relevant qualifications, demand for capable workers continues to outstrip supply. Sector feedback consistently identifies high rates of burnout and staff turnover and highlights the need for better support and recognition for frontline residential care workers.

A simple comparison of workforce data illustrates the urgency: the current number of residential care workers in Queensland is estimated to be between 3,000–5,000 depending on classification, yet demand is projected to rise significantly. The number of children and young people in residential care has steadily increased at an average annual rate of 16% per annum over the last 5 years¹. If the number of children and young people in residential care continues to grow at this rate, this would equate to approximately 3900 children and young people by 2028. If even 5–10% of the projected 57,000 new workers needed in the broader health and social assistance sector are to be absorbed into residential care to meet this demand, that equates to an additional 2,850 to 5,700 new workers by 2028. This essentially doubles the current workforce. This figure does not account for attrition or expansion of service models such as the introduction of the dual-worker model.

16% increased demand

for residential care per annum over last five years

Approx 3,900 young people

will be in care by 2028 if demand continues to rise at this rate

Double the current workforce

would be required to meet this demand for residential care alone

While the growth of the sector presents significant opportunities for jobseekers, it also poses challenges for service providers and government to make sure that the future workforce is not only sufficient in number but is also deeply skilled, values-aligned and equipped to deliver trauma-aware, culturally safe and developmentally responsive care. Addressing this need will require coordinated investment across recruitment, training, workforce planning and staff wellbeing strategies, particularly to attract and retain workers in under-served communities.



There is no clear occupation and no clear industry that directly relates to the residential care workforce ... at the Census people are asked to self-classify their occupation. Since there is no clear occupation, many workers will tick other boxes and might “be classified elsewhere”.

- The Demographics Group, 2025

Data gaps

Significant data gaps hinder efforts to strengthen and grow the residential care workforce. There is currently no shared system to track workforce supply, turnover or demand trends across Queensland. Role titles and qualification requirements vary across service providers, creating inconsistencies that make workforce planning difficult. Currently, there is no clear or specific category that captures the residential care workforce accurately. Some roles available for selection in the Census that residential care workers might select include:

- Child or youth residential care assistant
- Residential care officer
- Youth worker
- Special care worker

Additionally, most workforce estimates rely on self-reported data from the Census and provider surveys rather than formal, centralised workforce data collections. Without reliable and consistent data, it is difficult to accurately diagnose workforce size, projections, challenges, monitor progress or target investment effectively.



Workforce pressures

The residential care workforce in Queensland is under growing pressure. The Demographics Institute reports that “research has not identified any significant difficulty filling vacancies”, however, the sector reports that high turnover rates remain a persistent challenge, impacting on the stability of care for children and young people. Funding mechanisms that favour casualisation over secure employment contribute to workforce fragmentation, undermining team cohesion and continuity of care. Alongside this, workers face a high risk of burnout and psychological harm due to the complex, trauma-related needs they manage daily, often without the depth of support required. A consistent theme across consultations was the lack of meaningful supervision, with workers reporting that formal supervision processes often feel like compliance exercises rather than genuine opportunities for reflection and professional growth.



Worker expectations

The next generation of the residential care workforce is seeking more than a job. They are looking for values-aligned, purpose-driven roles where they can make a real difference. Workers want to be part of organisations that live their mission, not just state it. Practical, hands-on training and real-time support are increasingly seen as essential, not optional. Workers are calling for clear development pathways that recognise their contributions and build their skills, rather than a narrow focus on meeting minimum compliance requirements. The workforce of the future expects professional respect, meaningful supervision and career progression that acknowledges the complex and skilled nature of their work.

¹ Jobs Queensland. (n.d.). Anticipating future skills: Data explorer. Queensland Government. <https://jobsqueensland.qld.gov.au/anticipating-future-skills/data-explorer>

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024). Child protection Australia 2022–23: Supporting children. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2022-23/contents/insights/supporting-children>

³ Queensland Government Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services. (2024). 2024 Children in care census: Full report for publication. https://performance.dcssds.qld.gov.au/_media/documents/2024-children-in-care-census-full-report-for-publication.pdf

⁴ National Centre for Vocational Education Research. (n.d.). DataBuilder. <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/databuilder#>

⁵ National Centre for Vocational Education Research. (n.d.). DataBuilder. <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/databuilder#>

⁶ Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety. (2024). Our Performance. Retrieved from Department of Child Safety, Disability and Seniors: <https://performance.dcssds.qld.gov.au/>



The road ahead

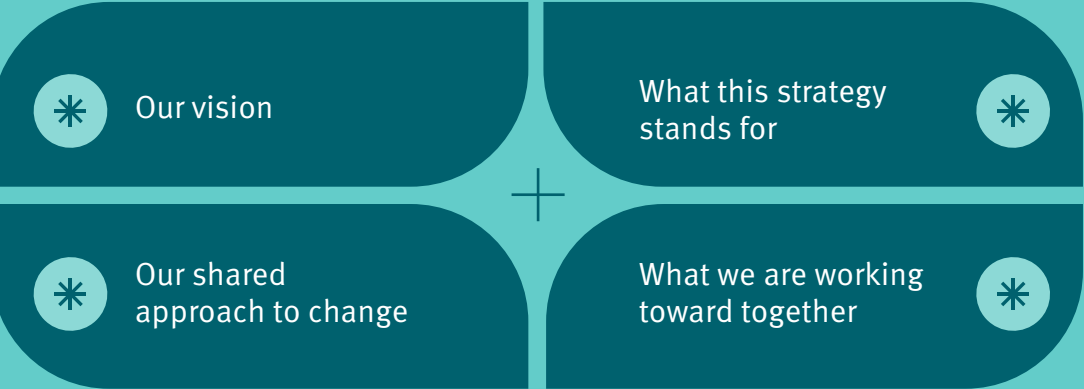
The broader care sector is projected to experience major growth over the next decade, increasing competition for skilled, compassionate workers. Residential care services will need to compete with other sectors (including disability services, early childhood education and mental health) for a discrete pool of talent. This makes it critical to create clear, supported entry pathways into the workforce and to offer structured, continuous professional development once workers are in roles. Workforce planning must be proactive, not reactive, recognising the skills and capabilities that will be needed into the future, and building a pipeline of workers who are trained, supported and valued.

Our workforce strategy

Voices from across the sector contributed to building a strategy informed by real-world challenges and hopes. Together, we have developed a shared vision of what the future residential care workforce looks like.



Looking to the future



Our vision

Our shared vision for the workforce has been developed by, and is reflective of, voices across the sector.



People who care, working together to empower and equip children and young people with the skills they need for life. When respected, supported and trusted, our workforce delivers safe, consistent and compassionate care every child and young person deserves.



Our vision supports our desire to build a workforce that meets the needs of children and young people in care today, while also shaping the workforce we need for the future.

Our shared approach to change

Realising a stronger residential care workforce requires shared commitment, shared responsibility and shared action.



This Strategy is not a standalone initiative, it is part of a larger reform agenda informed by the voices of those working every day in residential care, as well as children and young people, communities, sector leaders, peak bodies, government representatives, educators and support organisations. It represents a co-created path forward that acknowledges the diverse realities and aspirations across Queensland.

Throughout the 12-month consultation process to develop this Strategy, we heard from stakeholders across the state. The stories, insights and lived experiences shared during this time shaped every part of this Strategy. Whether it was the call for more respectful and culturally safe workplaces, the request for more stable career pathways, or the desire for recognition of the emotional toll of the work, each voice contributed to building a strategy informed by real-world challenges and hopes. Together, we have developed a shared vision of what the future residential care workforce looks like.

This outlines what we, as a sector, are working towards together and guides the outcomes and priority areas identified within this Strategy. Our approach centres on collaboration and connection. It recognises that no one stakeholder group can achieve this shared vision for the residential care workforce. The workforce must be supported by strong leadership, responsive training systems, enabling policies and a broader community that values and understands the unique role of

residential care. Therefore, this Strategy invites all stakeholders in the system to work in unison to align their efforts and stay focussed on what matters most: the wellbeing and futures of children and young people and recognising the importance of strengthening the workforce that cares for them.

This document now serves as a guide that outlines a shared understanding of where we are, where we want to go and how we might get there together. It does not dictate specific actions but provides consistent language, a shared vision, set of desired outcomes, list of priorities and collection of values that can guide decisions at all levels of the residential care sector.

Importantly, this Strategy is an invitation to keep talking, listening and learning together. It's about holding ourselves accountable to the change we want to see and continuously improving how we support the residential care workforce and by extension, the children and young people they care for. It is a living, evolving approach that encourages reflection, flexibility and partnership as we move forward.

What we heard

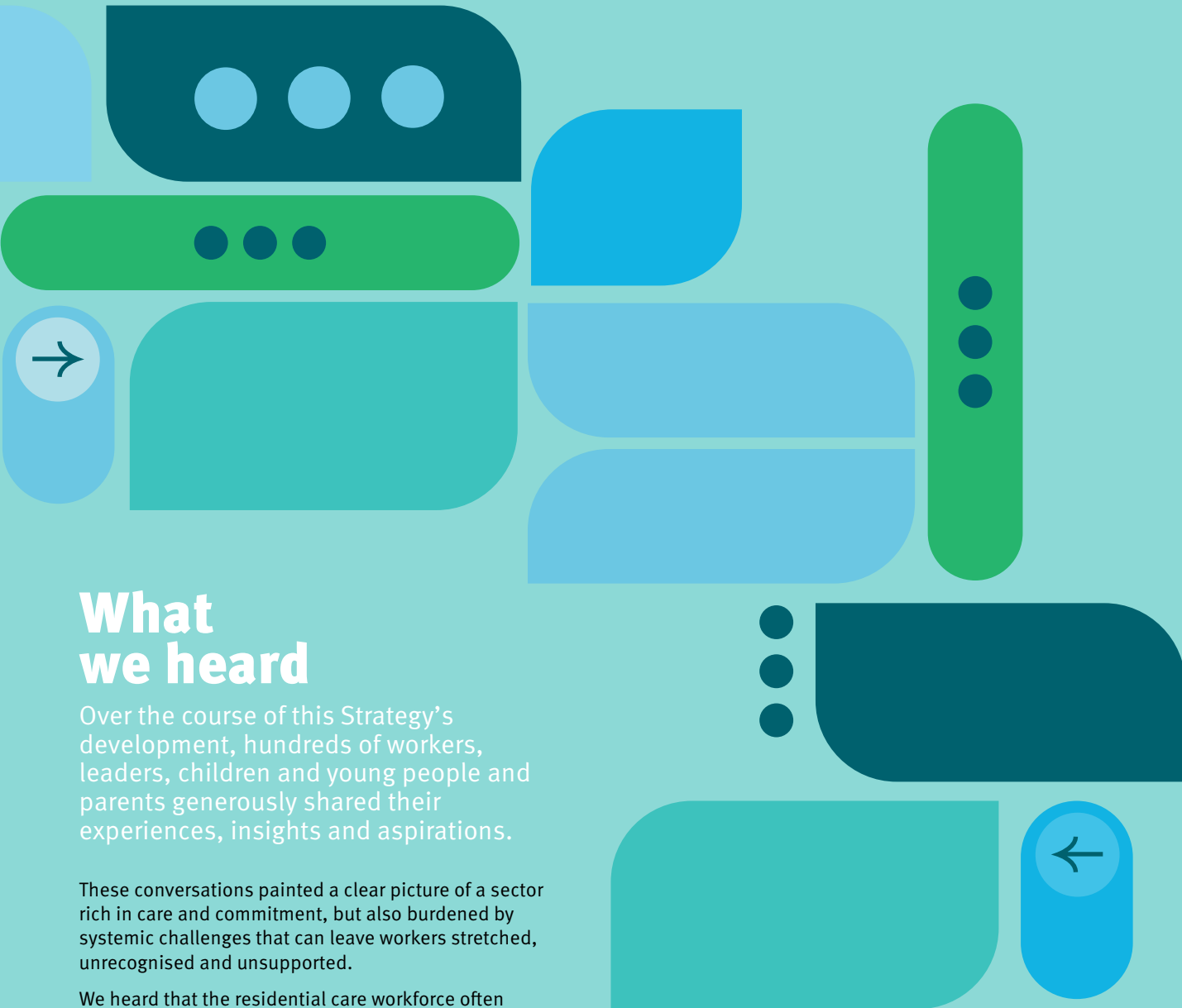
Over the course of this Strategy's development, hundreds of workers, leaders, children and young people and parents generously shared their experiences, insights and aspirations.

These conversations painted a clear picture of a sector rich in care and commitment, but also burdened by systemic challenges that can leave workers stretched, unrecognised and unsupported.

We heard that the residential care workforce often feels misunderstood or undervalued by the community and even within the broader child protection system. Worker's spoke of the emotional demands of their roles, the lack of consistent professional development, the strain of high staff turnover and the complexity of responding to trauma and crisis without sufficient wraparound support.

We also heard a deep sense of pride when people expressed profound connection to the children and young people they support, and a strong desire to grow in their practice and to contribute meaningfully to positive change. They want to be part of a sector that is safe, inclusive and built on trust, mutual respect and strong relationships.

Crucially, we also heard from young people who had lived in residential care. They shared what a positive relationship with a residential care worker can mean to them, and how the presence of safe, consistent adults can be life changing. Their voices have helped shape this Strategy, and to centre the workforce as a key lever for improving outcomes.



This strategy stands for:

Leadership that listens and walks alongside workers, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders who hold deep cultural knowledge and solutions.



A workforce that is empowered to grow, supported to stay and recognised for the vital role it plays in the lives of children and young people.



A residential care workforce that is valued.



Care environments that reflect the diversity of our communities.



Cultural safety that is embedded, not added.



How we show up:



By not accepting poor conditions or outdated assumptions as inevitable.



By being present, being open and being prepared to challenge the status quo.

By treating every interaction with workers, children, families and each other as an opportunity to build trust and respect.



By creating space for new voices and lifting each other up.



What we stand for and how we show up is underpinned by a set of core principles and values that guide behaviour, decision-making and interactions. These values represent what is important to individuals, organisations and systems, serving as a foundation for ethical conduct, relationships and cultural identity.



At the heart of this Strategy is a belief in dignity, respect and possibility.

<div><div>✱</div><div><div>VALUES</div><div>These values form the foundation of the attributes, competencies, capabilities and behaviours expected of the residential care workforce. In practice, values help define the culture of a workforce by establishing standards for behaviour, fostering consistency in decision-making and creating an environment where everyone understands what is expected.</div></div></div>	
<div><div>Integrity</div><div>We are transparent, accountable and follow through.</div></div>	<div><div>Compassion</div><div>We are passionate about children and young people’s futures.</div></div>
<div><div>Courage</div><div>We always work for the needs of children and young people.</div></div>	<div><div>Child and Family-Centered</div><div>We provide individualised care for each child and young person’s unique circumstances.</div></div>
<div><div>Connection</div><div>We build authentic and trusting relationships.</div></div>	<div><div>Growth</div><div>We are committed to learning and reflection.</div></div>
<div><div>✱</div><div><div>PRINCIPLES</div><div>The collective principles describe the culture we want to build, the relationships we want to foster and the kind of workforce we need to bring that vision to life.</div></div></div>	
<div><div>We prioritise connection, trust, compassion and genuine care as the basis for healing, development and safety.</div><div><div>Relationships are foundational</div><div>➤</div></div></div>	<div><div>We do what we say we’ll do. We own our actions, hold ourselves and others accountable and follow through with consistency and purpose.</div><div><div>Integrity and accountability guide us</div><div>➤</div></div></div>
<div><div>We centre cultural safety, respect for identity and inclusion in every interaction. We walk alongside First Nations peoples and value all forms of diversity.</div><div><div>We are culturally safe and responsive</div><div>➤</div></div></div>	<div><div>We listen to and act with children, young people and families, placing their voices, strengths and lived experiences at the heart of everything we do.</div><div><div>Children, young people and families lead the way</div><div>➤</div></div></div>
<div><div>We are better together. We show up as team players, share responsibility, support each other and learn collectively.</div><div><div>We work together</div><div>➤</div></div></div>	<div><div>We practice with curiosity and humility. We reflect, adapt and improve continuously because young people deserve our best, every day.</div><div><div>We are reflective, curious and growing</div><div>➤</div></div></div>
<div><div>We believe in children and young people and in each other. We bring energy, positivity and commitment to creating opportunities for healing, joy and futures worth believing in.</div><div><div>We lead with hope and purpose</div><div>➤</div></div></div>	<div><div>We create spaces where children, young people and the people who support them feel safe, supported, respected and able to thrive.</div><div><div>We create safe, stable and empowering environments</div><div>➤</div></div></div>

Challenging assumptions, –shifting our thinking

We all want children and young people in residential care to feel safe, respected and empowered. Achieving this requires more than new policies or better funding, it calls for a deep reflection on the beliefs that guide our actions.

Residential care is shaped not only by formal systems but by the everyday assumptions we make about the children and young people we support, the workers who care for them and the role of residential care itself. Some beliefs strengthen our practice. Others, even when well-intentioned, can unintentionally limit our expectations, decisions and behaviours.

During the development of this Strategy, people from across the state bravely named the assumptions they see in their work. Some beliefs were shared with pride, others emerged more quietly, shaping culture

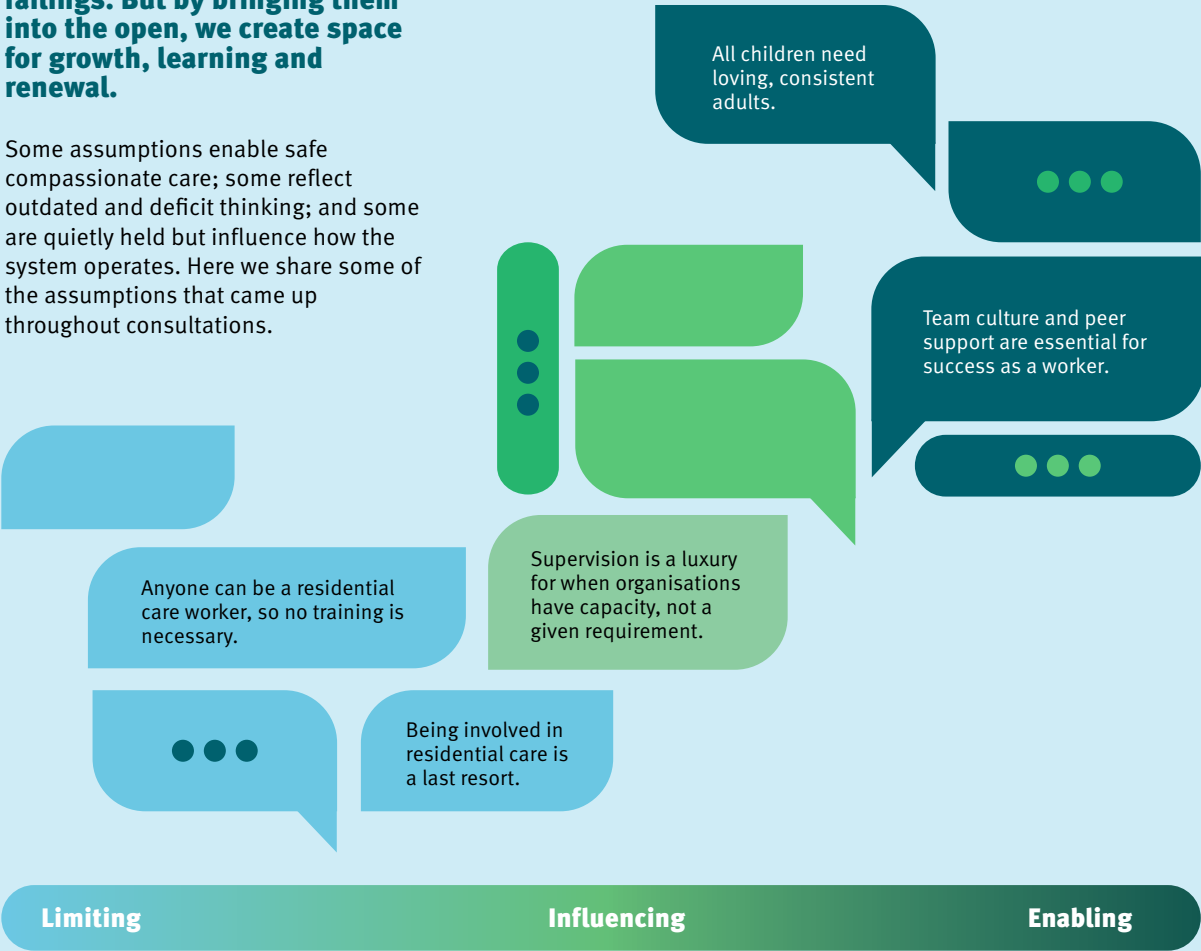
without being questioned. Together, they reveal where our thinking aligns with the values we want to uphold, and where it might need to shift.

This process isn’t about blame. While everyone holds assumptions, it is important to recognise and understand how our own assumptions can create implicit biases, shape our thinking and influence our beliefs and behaviour.

Shifts in the culture and narrative around residential care are necessary to support and uplift the children and young people in care and the workforce that support them. Ultimately, shifting culture starts with questioning assumptions. When we do this together, we build a stronger foundation for care that is relational and respectful.

Many of these assumptions are shaped by broader forces such as policy, funding models or public discourse, not individual failings. But by bringing them into the open, we create space for growth, learning and renewal.

Some assumptions enable safe compassionate care; some reflect outdated and deficit thinking; and some are quietly held but influence how the system operates. Here we share some of the assumptions that came up throughout consultations.



What we are working toward together

Realising meaningful change in residential care begins with a shared commitment to a better future, for children and young people and for the people who care for them. Across the sector, there is a clear desire to move beyond the status quo and build a stronger, more supported workforce that can sustainably deliver care for children and young people.

To bring the vision guiding this Strategy to life, we need practical, achievable areas of focus that everyone, including government, service providers, workers and communities, can work toward together. That’s what these six outcome areas represent.

 A profession to be proud of	 A workforce ready for now and the future	 A safe, empowered and supported workforce
 A sector that reflects and respects all	 A profession recognised by community and sector	 A leadership approach that walks with and for the workforce

They describe what needs to be true if we are to make lasting improvements across the sector. They directly reflect what children and young people, families, service providers, sector and workers have told us is needed to realise our shared vision. And, they respond to the current challenges facing the sector and highlight what needs to change to help

the workforce better support children and young people.

Each outcome area stands on its own, but together they form a picture of a workforce that is connected, capable and confident. One that is equipped to meet the needs of children and young people, now and into the future.

By aligning our efforts toward these outcomes, we take a collective step closer to the future we all want to see. A future where every child and young person in residential care is supported by a workforce that is empowered, valued and trusted to make a difference.



A profession to be proud of

Residential care is understood and respected as a meaningful, long-term career. Workers see a clear future in the work, with pathways that build on their strengths, values and life experience. The sector invests in growth, stability and belonging, not just recruitment.

Residential care is not just a job, it’s a vocation. It is one of the few roles in child protection that can have a direct, meaningful and tangible difference to a child or young person’s life. Workers describe themselves as carers, not ‘just’ youth workers or ‘babysitters’. They are consistent, trusted adults in the lives of children and young people who are navigating trauma, disconnection and uncertainty. Many workers feel undervalued, misunderstood or overlooked by the system, by the public and sometimes even by their own organisations.

While some workers shared they are hesitant about labelling the work as a ‘profession’ fearing it sounds clinical or disconnected, they are clear that what they do requires deep skill, care and

consistency. They see themselves as people who guide, empower, support and advocate for the children and young people in their care. What they want is recognition for the impact they have on children and young people’s lives, and for their contribution to be understood and valued.

Pride grows when people feel recognised for who they are and what they bring; not just formal qualifications, but life experience and relational care

Supporting workers to see residential care as a long-term, meaningful career means offering pathways, mentorship and opportunities to lead in different ways, including from the floor. A proud workforce is a stable workforce and that stability changes lives.

Sector voices: “I came into it wanting to make a difference.”
- Kingaroy



What this means for workers

- Workers feel a sense of pride and purpose in their roles.
- Feeling that the role matters and makes a meaningful difference in the lives of children and young people.
- High level of job satisfaction.
- Career progression is visible and achievable.
- Staff are more likely to remain in the sector long-term.
- Residential care is seen for some as a viable, first-choice career, not a fallback or a steppingstone.
- Organisations invest in leadership, growth and the wellbeing of workers.

What success looks like

- Workforce retention improves across the sector, particularly in frontline roles.
- Staff report a sense of purpose, value and connection to the work.
- Workers understand available pathways and feel supported to grow in the areas that align with their goals and strengths.
- New entrants are drawn to residential care through targeted promotional campaigns and attraction strategies.
- Career progression is linked to meaningful learning and reflective practice, not just formal qualifications.



A workforce ready for now and the future

→ The workforce is confident and well-prepared, with access to practical, ongoing and responsive training that reflects real experiences - including relationship-based care, cultural responsiveness and supporting the individual needs of children and young people.

To deliver safe, responsive and consistent care, the workforce needs more than compliance-focussed training. They need learning that reflects the reality of their work and the individual needs of the children and young people in care. This includes understanding trauma, child development and cultural identity. It also requires the ability to respond in unpredictable moments, regulate emotions and support healing through relationships.

In consultations, workers emphasised that training must evolve alongside practice. Induction programs need to go beyond theory to include shadowing, buddy shifts and real-time coaching. Supervision and team learning should be embedded into daily work and delivered consistently across the sector. This supports all workers, no matter which organisation they are part of, to have equitable access to the support they need to grow, reflect and improve.

Workers also highlighted the importance of access to role-specific and practical learning and resources. Particularly in areas such as supporting children under-12 and early childhood development, disability, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and medicine management. They called for greater recognition of life experience and relational skills as core components of care.

The workforce already holds deep insight and knowledge. What is needed is a system that recognises the capability that is required and creates the conditions for it to grow.

Sector voices: “You can’t learn this job from a manual. You have to live it, reflect on it, and keep growing.” Cairns



What this means for workers

- Workers feel prepared and supported to meet the demands of the role.
- Learning is practical, real-time and relevant to their specific context.
- Experience, insight and relational skills are recognised as core to effective practice.
- Supervision is meaningful, consistent across the sector and improves confidence and decision-making.
- Ongoing development is accessible, embedded in practice and valued by leadership.

What success looks like

- Workers receive relevant, role-specific and practical training upon entry and through ongoing refreshers, tailored to real-world needs.
- Organisations have access to consistent and contemporary statewide training resources.
- Life experience and relational skills are recognised alongside formal qualifications.
- Workers report increased confidence, adaptability and clarity in practice.
- Supervision is used as a learning and reflection tool, with outcomes meaningfully integrated into everyday care.



A safe, empowered and supported workforce

→ Workers feel safe, supported and are cared for in ways that help them care for others. Support is consistent, not conditional. They have access to regular debriefing, reflective supervision, peer support and leadership that listens, values their voice and shares decision-making.

Residential care work is fast-paced, unpredictable and filled with moments that require emotional presence, adaptability and quick thinking. Many workers shared that the unpredictability of the role, the challenges and the chance to make a difference in hard moments is part of what they love. But they also said that the challenge has to be matched with the right support.

Workers described feeling stretched, unsupported and in many cases unsafe. They spoke of managing high-risk situations alone, navigating trauma without space to debrief and lacking the tools or time to regulate themselves before continuing their work or showing up for their next shift.

Being and feeling safe must be a given, not something workers accept as negotiable. Feeling physically protected, psychologically safe and backed by leadership is fundamental to doing this work well. But safety is only the starting point. Empowerment grows when workers are trusted to make decisions, supported through meaningful supervision and connected to teams that debrief together, not just endured alone.

When the workforce is cared for, with time to reflect, engage with peers and lean on leadership, they are more likely to stay, grow and continue showing up for the children and young people who rely on them.



What this means for workers

- Workers feel physically and emotionally safe in their roles.
- They have regular access to reflective supervision, debriefing and peer support.
- Leadership is collaborative, responsive and present.
- Organisational culture prioritises worker safety and wellbeing.
- Staff feel equipped through ongoing training and supervision to manage stress, emotionally regulate and continue showing up with confidence.
- Teams operate with trust, clear communication and shared accountability.

What success looks like

- Staff consistently access reflective supervision, peer mentoring, and debriefing, with structured time allocated during shifts.
- Psychological safety improves across teams; workers feel safe to speak up and supported to recover after challenging situations.
- Workers feel empowered to make decisions in the best interest of children, with leadership and care teams that trust and back them.
- Wellbeing is treated as essential, with access to mental health supports and recognition of emotional load.
- Supervision is consistent across organisations and for permanent and casual staff, with systems in place to make sure that no one is left behind.



A sector that reflects and respects all

→ The workforce is diverse, inclusive and responsive - reflecting the strengths of communities it serves and creating environments where people of all backgrounds and identities feel seen, respected and empowered.

Residential care is a sector committed to equity, inclusion and respect for all individuals - children, young people, workers, families and communities. It recognises and responds to the diverse identities, backgrounds and experiences of those it serves, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTQIA+ young people and those with disabilities or lived experience of trauma.

Children and young people in residential care come from a wide range of cultural, spiritual, social and personal backgrounds. To provide safe, consistent and meaningful care, the workforce must reflect the diversity of the children and young people they care for. This diversity should be represented across values, relationships and leadership.

Workers reflected on the importance of being connected to respected leaders

and community knowledge holders. They shared that while many want to provide culturally safe and inclusive care, they often lack the confidence, support or resources to do their job. Some described feeling unsure about how to approach conversations around identity, culture or inclusion, especially when working with children and young people from communities they do not belong to. Others highlighted the absence of visible leadership and guidance from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people with disability and LGBTQIA+ communities.

Inclusion is not a checklist. It is a commitment to making sure that every person - whether a child, young person, family member or worker - feels safe, valued and heard. This means embedding genuine cultural responsive practice, place-based learning and leadership based on human rights, respect and dignity.



What this means for workers

- Workers feel confident in their ability to support young people from diverse backgrounds.
- They are supported by culturally informed leaders, community mentors and inclusive teams.
- Staff are empowered to engage in ongoing learning about culture, identity and inclusion.
- Diverse leadership models give workers role models they can relate to and learn from.
- Staff feel safe to express who they are and supported to grow into culturally responsive practitioners.

What success looks like

- The workforce reflects and respects the diversity of the communities and children they support.
- First Nations leadership is embedded in governance, training and frontline practice.
- Cultural learning is place-based and locally led, not just policy-driven.
- LGBTQIA+, disability inclusion and neurodiversity are reflected in training, workplace practices and leadership development.
- Staff feel respected and safe to express and honour their identities.
- Workers feel confident accessing leadership and guidance from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people with disability and LGBTQIA+ communities to improve practice.



A profession recognised by community and sector

→ Residential care workers are respected for their insight, skill and contribution. They are visible across the system and in the community, with their voice included in decisions and their stories told with pride.

Residential care is a vital, values-driven profession recognised by the community for its role in safeguarding and nurturing children and young people who cannot live safely at home. The profession demands emotional resilience, advanced interpersonal skills, cultural competence and a strong ethical foundation.

Recognition by the community comes from an understanding that residential care workers are not 'just carers' but staff working within a multidisciplinary system, contributing to child protection, education, mental health and community wellbeing. Like teachers, nurses and social workers, residential care staff are frontline workers - playing a critical role in shaping futures and upholding the rights and dignity of children and young people.

The dominant language around residential care continues to promote this placement type as a 'last resort' either due to the complexity of the needs of the

child or young person or the lack of family-based options to provide care. This can then unintentionally devalue the important role residential care plays as part of the out-of-home care continuum. This can result in the role of a residential care worker being seen as casual or entry-level, overlooking the value of the insights workers contribute to the case planning and service delivery to the children and young people in their care.

Recognition changes culture. It's about giving weight to the experience, insight and care that residential workers bring every day and making that part of how the system evolves. It means being respected by colleagues in other sectors and having their voice included in shaping policy and reform. When residential care workers are valued and recognised for the role they play, it creates the conditions for cultural change, improves workforce retention and fosters a shared sense of pride across the sector.



What this means for workers

- Workers feel seen and respected for their skills and the care they provide.
- Their contributions are acknowledged by peers, leaders and the broader community.
- They feel motivated to grow in their careers, knowing their work matters.
- Workers have opportunities to participate in forums that enable connection and collaboration with sector peers.
- External and internal recognition strengthens professional identity and morale.
- Staff feel proud to be part of a sector that values relational work and life experience.

What success looks like

- Residential care is publicly understood and valued, reflected in positive sector stories, lived experience campaigns and broader community awareness.
- Workers report feeling seen, heard and proud of their role.
- Recognition from internal and external stakeholders is embedded in everyday practice, not just formal awards.
- Workers feel their experience is listened to and shapes how the system improves.



A leadership approach that walks with and for the workforce



Leadership is relational, inclusive and embedded in practice. They walk alongside teams, listen first and create space for workers to lead with integrity.

Strong leadership shapes the everyday experience of the workforce. For residential care workers, leadership is not just about policies, procedures or performance management. It is about how people are listened to, how decisions are made and how values are embedded in practice. Workers expressed that the leaders they trust are those who are present, work alongside them and create safe spaces for reflection, growth and accountability.

Workers shared the impact of different leadership styles. Some described leaders who modelled integrity, guided teams through complex moments and centered the needs of children and young people. Others spoke about feeling unsupported or unheard, with decision-making disconnected from the

realities of the work. Workers also shared that leadership often comes from peers, mentors or colleagues, and that these informal leadership roles need greater visibility and value.

Leaders at every level of the sector should model the same values expected in care - empathy, consistency and integrity - and advocate for the workforce by actively addressing systemic challenges, championing wellbeing and pushing for the resources and recognition workers deserve.

When leadership is inclusive, consistent and culturally informed, it builds trust, strengthens retention and supports teams to do their best work. It also creates room for new leaders to emerge.

Sector voices: “It’s not just about managing a team, it’s about knowing your people and walking with them.” **Toowoomba**



What this means for workers

- Workers feel supported, heard and guided by leaders who understand the demands of the role.
- Staff experience leadership as relational, culturally responsive and embedded in practice, not just policy.
- Leadership roles are visible and accessible across levels, including peer mentoring, cultural guidance and lived experience expertise.
- Trust in leadership contributes to staff wellbeing, psychological safety and long-term commitment to the work.

What success looks like

- Leadership programs reflect relational, cultural and trauma-informed approaches, not just management skills.
- Frontline workers trust their leaders to listen, act and protect their wellbeing.
- Leadership opportunities are visible at all levels, including peer mentors, cultural leaders and lived experience champions.
- Leadership is inclusive of people who do not want formal progression but still influence and support others in meaningful ways.
- Succession planning includes diverse voices and future leaders from within teams.
- Leaders model the practice they expect, including showing up on the floor, supporting decision-making and reflecting shared values.

Moving from vision to action

Bringing our shared vision to life requires coordinated and meaningful change at every level of the system.

This section outlines four strategic priority areas that, together, create a clear pathway to realising our shared vision over the next five years. These priorities are not rigid directives; they are guiding commitments, offering adaptable ideas to inspire collaboration and innovation while respecting place-based and organisational contexts.

Each priority area reflects a core principle of the shared vision: that when respected, supported and trusted, our workforce can deliver the kind of care that every child and young person deserves. These guiding commitments highlight where energy and investment can be more impactful and how all parts of the system, from government and service providers, to educations, media, communities and workers themselves, can play a role in building a better future for children and young people in care.

These priorities suggest practical ways the desired outcomes can be achieved, encouraging us to move forward together, because real change happens when we all embrace this vision and play our part in creating the work our children and young people deserve.

Investing in developing system enablers to empower the workforce

This recognises that frontline care does not exist in isolation. A thriving workforce depends on strong, supportive foundations, fair and stable funding, responsive regulation, useful data and leadership that is visible in practice.

Creating meaningful career pathways and development opportunities

This aims to make residential care a profession that people choose, grow in and feel proud of. A workforce that is respected and nurtured is more likely to stay and thrive. By investing in training, recognition, mentoring and progression, we strengthen not only individual workers but the entire care environment around children and young people.



Building a collaborative and respectful workforce culture

This recognises the value of connection. To create the stability and belonging children and young people need, the adults around them must be united. This priority seeks to break down silos and foster a culture of relational practice, where collaboration, inclusion and cultural safety are embedded within practice.

Strengthening community understanding and support

This focuses on shifting the narrative that surrounds residential care. By building public awareness, amplifying the voices of children and young people and celebrating the skill and impact of residential care work, we begin to dismantle stigma and replace it with pride, dignity and inclusion. In doing so, we foster a culture where children and young people feel seen, valued and supported, and where the community rallies behind the people who care for them.



Across these priorities, this Strategy encourages cross-sector collaboration and shared responsibility. In moving from vision to action, we create the conditions where children and young people in residential care are empowered to thrive and where the workforce that supports them is equipped, trusted and proud.



Investing in developing system enablers to empower the workforce



To deliver the safe, stable and trauma-informed care that children and young people deserve, we must strengthen the system that supports those who provide it. The residential care workforce cannot thrive within outdated, fragmented or under-resourced systems. When funding, regulation, data and leadership are aligned with the realities of frontline work, they become powerful enablers of quality care.

Government, sector leaders, regulators and funders have a responsibility to commit to bold and coordinated investment in the system-level foundations that empower the residential care workforce. This means going beyond compliance to build a responsive system that listens to workers, values their insights and evolves with their needs.

Strong system enablers don't just support workers; they uplift the entire ecosystem of care. When workers are equipped, organisations are stronger. When data is meaningful, decision-making improves. When funding is stable, teams stay connected. And when leadership is nurtured, the sector grows.

This is the time to shift from reactive fixes to long-term foundations. The care of children and young people in residential care depends on the strength of the system that surrounds them, and the people who care for them every day.



How this could be achieved:

One of the most critical enablers of a strong workforce is a **funding model** that reflects the complexity and demands of residential care. Reforming funding structures could allow for secure employment arrangements, helping to reduce casualisation and support continuity of care. When workers feel stable in their roles, relationships with young people are more consistent and meaningful. Contracts could include dedicated funding for staff wellbeing, reflective supervision and peer mentoring, recognising that caring for carers is fundamental to quality practice. Flexibility in funding would also be important so that organisations are resourced to respond to the varying and often complex needs of the children and young people they support.

Better data and evidence systems could also play a key role in empowering the workforce. A centralised worker register could track critical workforce indicators such as supply, turnover, training needs and regional demand, allowing for more accurate and timely planning. When data is shared and used proactively, it could inform policy and resourcing decisions that directly impact frontline conditions. Importantly, these systems could be shaped to reflect the voices of lived experience and frontline workers themselves, embedding their knowledge into how information is collected, interpreted and reported.

Regulatory settings could also be designed to enable rather than constrain quality care. A review of existing requirements could help make sure they reflect best practice in trauma-informed and relational approaches, moving beyond minimum compliance. Qualification expectations could be simplified and standardised across service providers, making it easier for workers to understand what is required and move between roles. Most powerfully, regulatory frameworks could include formal mechanisms for frontline worker feedback, so those most affected by regulation are also involved in shaping it.

Investing in **leadership development** could help grow the next generation of sector leaders from within the residential care workforce. Programs could be funded and scaled that focus on relational, culturally responsive and practice-based leadership, not just administrative or managerial skills. Career pathways could be designed to allow experienced practitioners to lead from the floor, recognising that leadership can take many forms. Peer leadership and mentoring roles could also be embedded into team structures, with particular emphasis on supporting leadership in regional and remote areas where additional supports are often needed.

Finally, the broader **infrastructure that supports the workforce** could be significantly strengthened. This could include investment in clinical consultation, staff wellbeing hubs and mobile support teams that extend into rural communities. Digital tools and platforms could be made more accessible to enable real-time learning, reflection and cross-sector collaboration. Establishing communities of practice would allow workers to come together across organisations to share insights, build relationships and innovate around shared challenges. These supports would not only lift individual capability but build a culture of connection and continuous improvement across the sector.

By investing in these foundational system enablers, Queensland could create the conditions where residential care workers are not only supported but empowered. Where they feel part of a system that is built around their success, and in turn, the wellbeing of the children and young people they care for.



Creating meaningful career pathways and development opportunities



Residential care work changes lives, yet too often those who do this vital work are left without clear pathways to grow, lead or be recognised. Without meaningful development opportunities, we risk losing skilled, compassionate workers at a time when their presence matters most.

Government, service providers, training organisations and sector leaders have a responsibility to reimagine what it means to build a career in residential care. This means establishing clear, supported and respected pathways that honour life experience, elevate relational practice and encourage growth at every stage, from entry to leadership.

A valued workforce is a stable workforce. When residential care is seen as a credible, skilled and supported career, more people will choose to stay, grow and lead. With the right training, mentorship and recognition, workers are not only retained, they are inspired to shape the future of the care system.

Let's build a system that invests in frontline workers, grows with them and values their expertise as the foundation of safe, consistent and healing care for children and young people.



How this could be achieved:

Creating **meaningful career pathways** could begin with designing a clear and accessible framework that maps out how someone might grow within the residential care sector. A statewide Career Pathways Framework could be developed and shared, showing not just the roles that exist but how workers could move between them, whether they bring formal qualifications, life experience or deep cultural knowledge. It would recognise that not everyone aspires to management and would create genuine progression options for those who want to stay in frontline, relationship-based roles. By valuing practice as much as leadership, this approach would allow people to build a fulfilling career on their strengths and interests.

Training and continuous learning could form the backbone of this progression. Realistic, role-specific training designed around trauma-informed and relational care - not just compliance - would support workers to feel equipped and supported. Modular and micro-credential options could allow people to upskill flexibly while remaining in their roles. Early-stage supports such as buddy systems, shadowing and on-the-job coaching could become standard elements of induction, helping new workers gain confidence and grounding. This type of continuous professional development would make growth feel achievable, rather than out of reach.

Recognising the skill and dedication required for residential care work would also be essential to building a strong professional identity. A recognition framework could be established to formally acknowledge the contributions of frontline workers through awards, accreditation and celebration. Public storytelling could also help to shift community perception, sharing real examples of the compassion, expertise and emotional labour involved in the work. Universities, TAFEs and peak bodies could be engaged to actively promote residential care as a valued career path, not just a stop-gap or stepping stone.

Mentorship and peer development would play a vital role in retaining and growing the workforce. Structured mentoring programs could pair early-career workers with experienced practitioners, offering guidance, encouragement and real-world insight. Peer-led learning communities could provide safe, energising spaces for reflection, sharing practice and sparking innovation across services and locations. For those seeking direction in their career journey, funded coaching and planning supports could help clarify goals and open up opportunities.

Finally, **attraction and early career support** could help build a pipeline of committed workers from a range of backgrounds. Campaigns targeted at schools, TAFEs and community programs could raise awareness about the purpose and potential of residential care careers. Placement and graduate opportunities could provide hands-on experience for students in child, youth or community services courses. Entry-level traineeships and cadetships with wraparound supports could be offered to reduce barriers, especially for First Nations peoples and those in regional communities. This could mean that more people not only enter the workforce, but feel that they belong and can thrive.

Together, these approaches could help create a workforce culture in Queensland where people are inspired to begin, supported to grow and proud to stay. A culture where career development is not the exception, but the expectation, and where the expertise of residential care workers is recognised as a central pillar in supporting children and young people to heal and flourish.

Building a collaborative and respectful workforce culture



Children and young people thrive when the adults around them work together with trust, shared purpose and respect. Yet in residential care, too many workers operate in silos, isolated by organisational boundaries, fragmented systems or inconsistent practice. To deliver the stable, connected and healing environments that children and young people deserve, we must prioritise culture as much as capability.

Government, service providers, sector leaders and communities have a responsibility to foster a culture of genuine collaboration; one anchored in cultural safety, shared values and relational practice. This means moving beyond compliance or competition and toward a way of working where every team, every worker and every organisation feels aligned in their commitment to children’s wellbeing.

Collaboration is not a soft skill, it is a core condition for safe and effective care. When workers trust each other, when care teams are united and when services coordinate instead of compete, children and young people experience more stability, more safety and more hope.

Let us build a workforce culture that does not just support children and young people, but models the very connection, inclusion and respect we want them to experience.



How this could be achieved:

Building a collaborative and respectful workforce culture could begin by creating the conditions for **meaningful cross-agency collaboration**. Local and regional forums could bring together residential care workers, case managers, clinicians and community stakeholders to share knowledge and align their efforts. These forums would allow people to build relationships across organisational boundaries and develop shared practice agreements that create consistency for children and young people. Co-case planning could be embedded as a standard way of working, where residential care workers are respected as equal partners in decision-making, not peripheral observers. This would send a powerful message: that collaboration is not just encouraged but expected.

Shared learning and reflection would further strengthen these collaborative foundations. Inter-agency learning communities or communities of practice could be established to bring workers together around common goals such as trauma-informed care, cultural safety and relational practice. Joint training sessions would offer space for workers across different roles and organisations to learn with and from each other. Funding reflective practice could enable teams to step back, make sense of shared challenges and celebrate successes together. Over time, this would help create a culture where continuous learning is woven into the everyday fabric of care.

Embedding a **culture of respect and inclusion** would also be central. This could mean that First Nations Elders, cultural mentors and people with lived experience are not just consulted, but actively involved in team learning, leadership and planning processes. Their presence would ground teams in community knowledge, cultural wisdom and the real experiences of children and young people in care. By shining a light on stories of effective collaboration, where teams demonstrate genuine partnership, inclusion and mutual respect, we could begin to shift what is seen as exemplary practice.

Cultural safety and place-based practice sits at the heart of any workforce strategy. Aligning with QATSICPP’s Workforce Strategy, training and development could be tailored to the cultural and community context of each location. Partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations would be vital in shaping localised practice models that reflect the strengths and needs of community. Cultural safety would not be treated as a one-off event or compliance measure, but as a living part of team culture. This could be developed through ongoing learning, reflective supervision and culturally capable leadership.

Finally, **system-level recognition and support** could embed these ways of working sustainably. Organisational KPIs and performance measures could be expanded to value collaboration and relational leadership, not just compliance or output. Funding models that prioritise continuity of care, shared planning and joint outcomes would help organisations work together instead of in competition. Regulatory frameworks could include indicators of collaboration, workforce safety and staff voice so that quality care is understood not only through outcomes for children and young people, but also through the wellbeing and unity of the teams who support them.

Together, these approaches could begin to realise a workforce culture in Queensland where trust, inclusion, and shared responsibility are not aspirations, but everyday practice.



Strengthening community understanding and support

Children and young people in residential care deserve more than safety. They deserve connection, respect and belonging. Yet public misunderstanding and outdated stigma too often leave them, and those who support them, isolated. Now is the time for communities across Queensland to stand together in reshaping the narrative.

Government, service providers, educators, media and everyday Queenslanders have a responsibility to champion a new story. One that recognises residential care as a vital, skilled and compassionate part of our child protection system. One that celebrates the courage and strength of children and young people and honours the commitment and impact of those who walk beside them every day.

By building public understanding, confronting stigma and promoting inclusion, we create the conditions for healing and hope. Every conversation, policy, campaign and act of allyship can help foster a society where all children and young people, regardless of their care experience, feel seen, valued and supported.

Together, let us build a culture that upholds the dignity of children and young people in care and respects the workforce who support them. The future of residential care is a shared responsibility, one we must all be willing to carry.

How this could be achieved:

Achieving this vision requires coordinated, compassionate action across sectors and communities. **Public awareness and storytelling are key.** A statewide campaign could challenge stigma and promote understanding by sharing real, positive stories from residential care that centre the voices of children and young people and the frontline workers who support them. Partnering with media outlets to establish responsible reporting guidelines would help make sure that coverage of residential care is respectful, accurate and strengths-based. Celebrating the journeys of young people transitioning from care, as well as the dedication of long-serving residential workers, would humanise the sector and foster pride.

Central to this effort would be **active involvement of children and young people themselves.** Campaigns and materials co-designed with those who have lived experience would promote authenticity and relevance. Establishing Youth Ambassadors or Advocates would enable young people to lead the way by sharing their stories in schools, community forums and training sessions to build empathy and challenge misconceptions.

Community engagement could also play a powerful role. Volunteer and mentoring programs would offer children and young people opportunities to build trusted relationships with supportive adults and strengthen social networks. Collaborations with local councils and neighbourhood centres could help embed inclusion into communities, fostering environments where residential care homes are understood, respected and supported.

Raising the **visibility and value of the workforce** is also important. A 'Pride in Practice' recognition initiative could celebrate the skill and impact of residential care workers, while targeted campaigns in schools, universities and job readiness programs could promote residential care as a meaningful career pathway.

Education and cross-sector understanding are also critical. Workshops and presentations for educators, police, healthcare providers and other key sectors could deepen awareness of the role and importance of residential care. By embedding content on care experience and trauma-informed practice into university and training curriculum, we could work towards future workers entering the sector equipped to respond with empathy and insight.

Finally, **meaningful change should be reflected in policy and language.** Advocating for the use of affirming, strengths-based language in government documents and discourse to move away from terms like 'placement of last resort' could shift the narrative at a systemic level. Making sure residential care is represented in child wellbeing and community safety planning processes would help embed its value across the broader child protection landscape.

Together, these actions can bring to life a shared vision: a Queensland where children and young people in residential care are not only safe but seen, supported and embraced by the communities around them.

Conclusion

A strong, skilled and supported residential care workforce is essential to delivering safe, stable and trauma-informed care for children and young people. This Strategy provides a shared foundation for workforce development, so that the sector is equipped to meet the evolving needs of those in care.

By strengthening system enablers, fostering professional development and promoting sector-wide collaboration, residential care workers can be empowered to provide meaningful, relational care. A workforce that is valued, prepared and resilient contributes to not only better outcomes for children and young people but also a more sustainable and effective system overall.

The success of this Strategy relies on ongoing engagement across government, service providers, educators and

communities. Together, we can shape a workforce that is recognised for its expertise, supported in its role and positioned to deliver care that transforms lives.

Through strategic investment, shared vision and collective action, this Strategy sets the foundation for a workforce that thrives so that children and young people are surrounded by stable, skilled and culturally responsive caregivers who walk alongside them every day.

