



NAPCAN Submission

to the

**Queensland Child Protection
Commission of Inquiry**

January 2013

23 January 2013

The Honourable Tim Carmody SC
Commissioner
The Inquiry into Queensland's Child Protection System
BRISBANE Queensland 4001

Dear Commissioner Carmody

I present the following document as the formal submission from the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN) to the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry (QCPCI).

With respect to the Commission's reporting schedule we have endeavoured not to reiterate arguments captured in submissions already before the Commission and only provide key insights based on our work and expertise in primary prevention and programming.

I hope that the Commission will provide recommendations for reforms to the child protection system that considers the value of primary prevention initiatives in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in Queensland.

I have included material on our successful programs, operating in various locations across Queensland and nationally, and can provide further detail on these upon request.

Please contact either myself on 02 9269 9200 or NAPCAN's QLD Manager, Angela Jegou, 07 3287 3533 if you any further information.

Yours sincerely



Richard Cooke
CEO NAPCAN

Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry

Introduction

NAPCAN (National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry. As an organisation that has a strong history in and continues to work daily with communities, organisations and individuals towards advancing preventative strategies for children and young people to minimise exposure to abuse and neglect, NAPCAN is well positioned to make comment.

As a not for profit organization, NAPCAN advocates on behalf of children and young people to promote positive change in attitudes, behaviour, policies, practices and the law to prevent abuse and neglect and ensure the safety and wellbeing of all Australian children.

NAPCAN works with communities, researchers, professionals, government, business, the media and committed individuals to bring about this change and has coordinated the annual National Child Protection Week campaign since 1990. The campaign is in line with the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children and encourages everyone to "Play their Part, as child protection is everybody's business".

NAPCAN recognises the time constraints on the Commission and as such will limit our submission to the issue before the Commission of "whether the current use of available resources across the child protection system is adequate and whether resources could be used more efficiently" which falls within the field of NAPCAN's expertise in primary prevention and prevention programming.

When communities and individuals are informed, better connected and feel empowered, they are better equipped and able to make positive changes in their lives and reduce the risk of harm to them and their families. NAPCAN works with and within communities to promote positive and evidence based practices through various mediums, such as workshops, education, websites, social media, and printed material. NAPCAN has received recognition for our work in prevention programs such as LOVEBITES, Play a Part and All Children Being Safe. Our work in communities especially in rural and remote areas of Australia provides much needed resources and strengthens capacity for communities to lead prevention initiatives.

Currently NAPCAN's Play a Part program is working with over 100 key agencies across Queensland to implement programming in communities that encourages cohesive best practice and community-led prevention strategies. While NAPCAN has had a presence in Queensland since its inception in 1989, in recent years the Play a Part (PaP) program has been a central

focus. This program was piloted between 2007 & 2010 in five southeast Queensland communities; Gold Coast, Toowoomba, Chermside, Inala to Goodna, and Springfield. Currently

NAPCAN is running programs in the Queensland communities of Beenleigh, Eagleby in the Logan City region and in Redland Bay, Victoria Point, Russell & Macleay Islands in the Redlands region. Various additional sites (through local organisations) across Queensland have received information, education/training/workshops and/or resources.

Submission to the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry

Firstly we would like to acknowledge and commend the proactive step the Government has taken in establishing this Commission of Inquiry. The Commission is tasked with making a “full and careful inquiry in an open and independent manner of Queensland's child protection system” and therefore is well placed to consider the Queensland child protection system holistically and recommend reforms to restructure a system which is showing signs of strain. Any reforms should be evidence based and consider the voices and experiences of children, young people and their families.

The high rates of notifications, substantiations and the numbers of children in out of home care in Queensland signal the need for a shift away from a focus only on tertiary intervention to one which also includes primary prevention. The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children which was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2009 recognises this over-reliance on tertiary child protection responses and to one which also promotes a universal primary prevention.

However whilst the adoption of this framework is a major achievement at the national level, particularly in establishing consistent definitions of the ‘problems’ it has not yet managed, nor can it alone, shift the system towards a significant distribution of resources towards primary prevention services. It is a positive collaboration from all the States and Territories, however there is not yet a nationally recognised and consistent approach to child protection leading to variable experiences for children, young people and families across the country. In restructuring the child protection system and directing additional funds and resources towards primary prevention, Queensland could lead the trend nationally.

1. Considerations on “the current use of available resources across the child protection system and whether resources could be used more efficiently”.

With the current system clearly struggling under the weight of tertiary services and statutory interventions, as evidenced by the increasing number of notifications and children entering and staying in out of home care, it is NAPCAN’s position that a greater investment in prevention; in developing strong, supported and cohesive communities would over the longer term be an effective utilisation of resources.

There is a range of information already before the Commission, in submissions provided by organisations such as QCOSS, PeakCare, ACT for Kids and others, which comprehensively details this issue of the overburdened statutory system in Queensland, NAPCAN will not revisit these matters here, instead providing advice based on our expertise in primary prevention and prevention programming.

As supported in the submissions mentioned above, there is a growing imperative for the Government to commit to universal primary prevention initiatives as a substantial and integral part of the child protection system.

In the widely accepted public health model, an effective child protection system needs to provide a continuum of supports and services that extends from primary, secondary and tertiary prevention to statutory interventions, with greatest emphasis on universal primary prevention services. The current system is heavily focused towards tertiary and statutory interventions but without a stronger focus on prevention the size of the challenge will not decrease.

As noted in PeakCare’s submission to the Commission, “The irony is that, despite the commitment made to ‘reversing the pyramid’, the number of and rate per 1000 children receiving statutory child protection services continues to increase and the real recurrent expenditure (reported in the Report on Government Services 2012) on the most intensive services - child protection and out-of-home care - continues to increase each year. From 2009/10 to 2010/11....Queensland reported an increase of over 20% on child protection services, compared with a less than 5% increase across all Australian jurisdictions. Notwithstanding that the rate of entry to care has stabilised in Queensland, the overall number of children entering the system and living in out-of-home care is increasing, and projected to continue increasing in 2012/13.”¹

A child protection system aimed at maximising the impact of its limited resources, should invest in the development of initiatives which strengthen the capacity of families and communities to adequately provide for and nurture their children, which will over time reduce the numbers of children requiring the assistance of the statutory child protection system.

¹ Preliminary Submission by PeakCare Queensland – October 2012, p.15

² Tomison, A; 2002, *Preventing child abuse: Changes to family support in the 21st century*, The Australian Institute of Family Studies.

The cost-benefits of implementing primary prevention services would in time, reduce the need for additional outlay, not only in the secondary and tertiary arenas of child protection, but in related overburdened systems as well, such as health, mental health, the legal system and crisis services. Early intervention approaches have demonstrated that they are a cost-effective means of supporting families and improving health and well-being². Access Economics has undertaken cost-benefit analysis of the cost of supporting children who have been abused in 2007 which supports this position³.

Historically, understanding the causes of child abuse and neglect focused on the characteristics of the abusing parent. More recently this understanding has shifted to one that acknowledges that the safety and wellbeing of children is a function of complex range of interacting factors at the individual, family, community and societal level. This shift has been informed by the ecological model of child development⁴ which sees abuse as determined by multiple factors at play at the levels mentioned above but also in the broader social, political, economic and cultural environment. These factors are not just cumulative but also interactive, as vulnerability at one level can impact on a child or family's vulnerability in another.

Therefore it is important to place child abuse prevention within the broader context of the prevention of societal breakdown, as experience shows that children who are abused have an increased risk of substance addiction, crime, homelessness, poor physical and mental health, housing insecurity and social and economic disadvantage. Social disadvantage and exclusion must be tackled at a whole of community level with strategies developed to overcome the constraints of focusing on individual causes and the restrictive silos of government and non-government agencies.

Research shows communities that are cohesive and in which people feel connected are less likely to experience social problems including child abuse and neglect and will have more capacity to resolve local problems and issues collectively⁵. However, the sustainable success of such projects and to see an actual shift in trends of the numbers of notifications of children and young people who have been abused or neglected, requires long term funding and commitment. A robust and effective primary prevention strategy would include universal services for parents, such as home visiting, parenting programs, quality early childhood care and education, strong support for children and young people throughout their development, as well as investment in community development initiatives.

² Tomison, A; 2002, *Preventing child abuse: Changes to family support in the 21st century*, The Australian Institute of Family Studies.

³ Access Economics Pty Ltd; 2008, *The Cost of Child Abuse in Australia*, Australian Childhood Foundation.

⁴ Bronfenbrenner, U; 1979, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press.

⁵ Vinson 2006 ; and ; Peltola, C & Testro P; 2009, *Towards a Better Future: preventing child abuse and neglect*. Produced by NAPCAN.

A well documented case of a successful community-based child abuse prevention program is that of Windale, a suburb in the NSW Lake Macquarie area. In 1999, it was the most socially disadvantaged suburb in NSW, yet within four years it moved from the worst one percent in the State to the best 25%. This was achieved through the establishment of a community centre attached to the local primary school. From that sprang a range of supports for parents, the children and the overall community. Over time, Windale Primary School became a hub of the community, creating strong connections between individual families and the local social network⁶. Building social connectedness is an efficient and effective strategy in reducing child abuse.

There will be many efficiency gains that the Queensland Government can achieve in the current child protection system but the most effective long term strategy with the best outcome for Queensland Communities will always be stopping child abuse before it happens. This will require an investment in primary prevention strategies.

An example of a primary prevention initiative in Queensland is the community education workshops and community development processes being utilised (see NAPCAN's Play A Part and Growing Respect programs described in section 2 below) to initiate and implement prevention strategies targeted to increasing the resilience of residents through processes led and owned by the local community. This community development response engages various stakeholders and community leaders in locally responsive solutions making best use of existing resources and infrastructure. Locally owned solutions enhance and strengthen sustained prevention practice or activities.

2. NAPCAN's experience with programming in primary prevention

NAPCAN has extensive experience in developing programming in child abuse prevention. A brief outline of our programs is below, further information can be provided to the Commission upon request.

2.1 Community capacity building

- Play A Part

NAPCAN's Play A Part program is currently operating in the communities of Beenleigh, Eagleby, Redland Bay, Victoria Point, Russell and Macleay Islands, and is an evidence based, whole of community approach to creating child friendly communities. The program utilises an assets based approach to community development, building on the existing strengths of the community including expanding existing relationships to benefit community determined goals. Children and

⁶ARACY, 2010, *Promoting Shared Responsibility for Vulnerable Children & Families*.

young people are seen as crucial contributors to any projects and are actively engaged in decision making.

The program has had recognised success in empowering communities to identify goals and implement projects that benefit the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in their local area. As communities develop their capacity and confidence through delivering projects, the established relationships then allow for new projects to be developed. In recognition of the ingenuity and successes seen in this program, NAPCAN was nominated by peer organisations/individuals for a 2012 Queensland Child Protection Week 2012 Community Initiative award.

- **GROWING RESPECT**

NAPCAN's GROWING RESPECT program is a community-led, whole of school and community approach to respectful relationships education for children and young people. The program works in partnership with communities to strengthen their capacity to support children and young people to develop healthy and respectful relationships.

The GROWING RESPECT programs include whole of school and community approaches to respectful relationships education, including the senior school LOVE BiTES program and primary school and preschool ALL CHILDREN BEING SAFE Programs that are currently implemented in over 100 communities across Australia. A pilot program of the GROWING RESPECT community-led planning, research and evaluation of whole of school and community approach is currently being undertaken in partnership with six Aboriginal communities across Australia. NAPCAN and the partner communities will develop locally-relevant and culturally-strengthening respectful relationships programs for children and young people aged 4-17 years; with the research and evaluation framework allowing for the further development of learning about what works in preventing gender-based violence across Australia.

2.2 School-based programming for children and young people

- **LOVE BiTES**

One of NAPCAN's most successful national programs is the LOVE BiTES Respectful Relationships program for young people aged 14-16 years, that is currently being implemented in over 120 communities across remote, regional and urban Australia. LOVE BiTES aims to break the intergenerational cycles of gender-based relationship violence, by supporting young people to develop respectful relationships skills and to raise awareness via youth-led campaigns

in their local communities. NAPCAN works actively with local leaders, schools and community services to build their capacity to facilitate this primary prevention program; and to adapt the

content to be locally relevant and to continue meeting best practice standards in violence prevention education.

- All Children Being Safe

All Children Being Safe (ACBS) is a preschool and early primary school protective behaviours program developed to provide children (aged 4-8 years) with non-threatening ways to help them feel strong and stay safe in their communities. The program explores safety messages (feelings, people and places) with children using bush animal stories, supported by learning activities including art, drama and music. ACBS was developed in partnership with a community in NSW and has since been successfully trialed and evaluated in other areas. A most recent pilot of this program conducted in Tamworth NSW was evaluated in 2012 by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) which found the program had positive impacts on children's knowledge of protective behaviours⁷.

3. Other key considerations for the Commission

3.1 Fiscal challenges for implementation

A significant challenge for this Commission is providing recommendations for restructuring the child protection system at a time of fiscal restraint in Queensland. The TOR asks the Commissioner to deliver recommendations which are "affordable, deliverable and provide effective and efficient outcomes".

Investing in effective primary prevention initiatives will deliver benefits to the community and cost savings to the Government in the direct form of reduced burden to child protection and to related portfolios such as the criminal justice system, public health and housing. Significant reforms to ensure effective primary prevention outcomes that stop child abuse before it happens requires a long term commitment and funding, but in the longer term is the most effective and efficient strategy to combat this important issue.

Strong investment from Government towards an integrated approach to community strengthening and addressing the underlying social risk factors, such as drug and alcohol abuse, mental health, crime, economic and housing insecurity, poor infrastructure and social isolation along with investment in parental education and support, and the education system including quality affordable early childhood care and education will reduce the demand for costly tertiary and statutory child protection services.

⁷ Price-Robertson, R, Higgins, D and Meredith V; 2012, *Evaluation of the All Children Being Safe Pilot*, The Australian Institute of Family Studies.

This investment will give rise to a generation of Australian's with less need for tertiary child abuse services, more social cohesion, and a higher rate of engagement in the labour market that will contribute more in taxes and social capital.

3.2 Ensuring the voice of all concerned groups, particularly children and young people, are heard and used to inform recommendations

It is essential that those who are to be affected most by changes to the child protection system are included in any processes run by the Commission and any resulting recommendations are reflective of their views. This includes children and young people who are in care as well as families who have had contact with the child protection system, Indigenous elders and community members, culturally and linguistically diverse community leaders and frontline staff from government and non-government services.

The system is established to support any families that may require assistance with ensuring the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people and it must recognise that this is not a homogenous group. While many families in contact with the child protection system may share characteristics that classify them as vulnerable or at risk, there is still sufficient diversity between them to require locally led responses. It is also crucial to consider the diversity of children, young people and their families in any reform process as this impacts on access to and uptake of services.

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3.3 Whole of community approach to prevention

As discussed in section 1 above, research has shown that a multifaceted approach is required to tackle the issues of child abuse and neglect. In 2012, the Australian Institute of Family Studies released a paper demonstrating the successes of education in the home and school settings - safety issues, risk factors, building confidence and resilience, community awareness campaigns, reinforcing positive behaviour messages, and parenting and family support - which have shown to have had positive and lasting effects years after implementation⁸.

NAPCAN strongly supports the introduction of a universal whole of community approach to the planning, implementation and delivery of evidence based strategies in the prevention of child abuse and neglect, which include the valued input of children, young people, families, communities and professionals.

⁸ Nair, L, March 2012, *Safe & Supportive Families and Communities for Children*, Studies, Child & Family Community Australia [CFCA], Published by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, 17 pp.