

Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry
Statement of Witness

Date: 15.1.2013Exhibit number: 142

I, [REDACTED] c/o the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Legal and Advocacy Service 26/43 Lang Parade Milton, Queensland affirm:

1. I am of the Gurang Gurang clan. My parents were both Aboriginal. They are from the Bundaberg and Cooma areas.
2. I am proud of who I am as an Aboriginal woman. I am proud of my culture and proud to share my culture.
3. My father was from the stolen generation. He was taken to Bundaberg when he was twelve and that was where he met my mother. My mother died when I was young so it was my father who raised me and taught me about our culture.

Acknowledgements

4. I want to acknowledge our elders, both past and present.
5. Culture is everything to Aboriginal people. It is very important that we keep our culture. By sitting around and listening to the old people we learn how to live, learn to respect and learn how to look after each other.
6. We believe in looking after each other, supporting each other and sharing what we have.

Background

Contact with the child protection system as a mother

7. I first came in contact with the child protection system when I was about 25 years old. At that time my three children were removed from my care for three months because of domestic violence. I was allowed to visit the children on weekends for two hours.

Contact with the child protection system as a grandmother

8. I am now the grandmother of 27 grandchildren. At one time I had 11 of my grandchildren in my care.
9. The first time I had contact with the child protection system as a grandmother was about seven years ago.
10. Child Safety had received a notification that one of my daughter's children, and her cousin, were playing on the road. They had got out from under the fence in our yard. They were found on the road and returned to our house by a neighbour.

[REDACTED]
Signature of witness


Person taking statement

11. Child Safety told our daughter that she had to move out of our house to a safer place if she wanted to keep her children.
12. Although we assisted my daughter find alternative accommodation, she was evicted. Shortly afterwards Child Safety removed her children from her.
13. I asked Child Safety if I could be the kinship carer of my daughter's five children. I was already caring for two of my other grandchildren.
14. Child Safety told me I was unsuitable as a carer because of a history of domestic violence between my husband and me.
15. Child Safety also told me that I would be approved to care for my grandchildren if I moved out of the house that I shared with my husband. We separated so that I could care for my grandchildren.
16. Before my kinship carer status was approved, the grandchildren were separated and placed with four different families. Two of the grandchildren were placed with non-Indigenous carers.
17. I moved into a Department of Housing house.
18. My husband would visit the house to help me supervise the children and maintain the property. All of the people that I dealt with from child safety were aware of my husband's help.
19. The house that I moved into was situated close to a tavern. People would often turn up intoxicated and I would call the police.
20. The Department of Housing received complaints about the regular police visits to my house and I was told I had to move.
21. At that time I had six of my grandchildren in my care.
22. One of my daughters gave birth to her sixth child and child safety removed the baby from her care at four days old. The baby was placed with a non-Indigenous carer then placed in my care at three weeks old.
23. I was asked to move house again. I did not want to move to the house that was being offered because it was situated on a very busy road and I knew it would be dangerous for the kids.
24. I was told by the Department of Housing that if I did not take the house I would go to the bottom of the list and that I would lose my grandchildren. For this reason I decided to move.
25. I had eight grandchildren living with me at the time.
26. Two days after moving into the house, I heard horns blaring as the kids had run out on the road to get a ball.
27. There were a number of incidents where people would try and break into the house. Strangers would turn up and sit on the front steps.


Signature of witness


Person taking statement

28. On one occasion a man climbed in the window of my granddaughter's bedroom. She screamed and he jumped out the window. The incident was treated as an attempted abduction and received coverage on the news.
29. My grandchildren and I slept on mattresses in one room because we were all frightened.
30. I eventually found out that there was a halfway house for ex-prisoners and convicted paedophiles very close to our house.
31. My grandchildren and I all wanted my husband – the children's grandfather - to come and live with us. We all felt unsafe.
32. Eventually we were moved to a new area.
33. When I moved house the case planning for my grandchildren was transferred to the [REDACTED] child safety service centre.
34. The [REDACTED] child safety service centre took a different view of the way that I cared for my grandchildren. They didn't want my husband to come around and help me anymore and I felt like they were watching me closely – waiting for me to do something wrong.
35. I am no longer a kinship carer. However, I still have three of my grandchildren in my care. They are subject to child protection orders and are not allowed to live with me but they ran away from their carer's home. Child Safety knows that I have my grandchildren in my care - they have stopped trying to move them.
36. Most recently I lost my 5 year old grandson who had been in my care since he was a baby.
37. My grandson and a number of my other grandchildren are placed with non-Indigenous foster carers.
38. Child Safety says that I am not a 'suitable person' because they think that I cannot prioritise my grandchildren over my adult children. They have described my family as chaotic and they have accused me of playing 'the race card' to justify the way that I have cared for my grandchildren.

Observations of the child protection system

Front-line child safety staff

39. While I was a kinship carer the child safety officers responsible for the children changed regularly. There would have been five or six different child safety officers over two years.
40. Child safety officers are usually young and non-Indigenous. They are often just out of university and they usually do not have children of their own.

[REDACTED]
Signature of witness


Person taking statement

41. Child safety officers usually have no idea about Aboriginal culture or how to work respectfully with Aboriginal peoples.

Recognised Entity

42. I have never found IFACSS, the Recognised Entity, to be supportive.

43. I was often told that IFACCS were coming out for meetings. These meetings never eventuated.

44. During Family Group Meetings IFACSS contribute nothing to the meetings. They should speak up for our people and defend us.

Cultural considerations

45. None of the non-Indigenous child safety officers that I have come into contact with have any understanding of my culture.

46. Child safety officers have told me that I need to do workshops to learn about my culture. I find this offensive.

47. Although there are Aboriginal workers within Child Safety, they need to get out in the community and listen to people's stories and learn about the families they are dealing with. I have tried to encourage the Aboriginal workers to do this.

48. I know that every child that goes into care should have a case plan. I have never seen a cultural case plan.


49. Child safety officers have contacted me for advice about cultural issues or to find out which family a child belongs to. I always provide the information to them because I care about the children but I think that Child Safety should have better ways of finding out about our culture and our families.

50. Some of my grandchildren have had issues when placed with non-Indigenous carers. My granddaughter was told not to dress like a 'dirty Aboriginal' whilst she was in the care of non-Indigenous carers. Another time my granddaughter painted a picture of a beautiful leaf and I told her to take it back to the home of her carers and hang it in her room. She told me that she could not do that as her carers told her she is not allowed to have anything Aboriginal.

51. I continually hear stories like these from my grandchildren. When I tell people from child safety I know that I am not listened to. My grandchildren are suffering silently and they do not want to speak up because they are scared I will get into trouble and they will no longer be able to see me.

Recommendations

52. I think that the reason that there are so many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system is that there is not enough cultural understanding.


Signature of witness

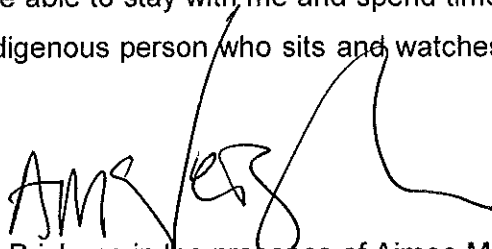

Person taking statement

53. In our culture, we always keep our kids within the family when there are problems. If there are problems in the family - like violence - the parents need time to heal while the kids stay with other family members for a while. Instead, Child Safety seems to punish women who have been impacted by violence.

54. I think the Recognised Entities need to change the way that they work. They do not support our people or look out for them and speak up for them. They do not act in the best interests of Aboriginal people. They need to get out in the community and listen to families and do their jobs properly.

55. Before I leave this earth I want to see all my kids happy and reunited with their children. I want my grandchildren to be able to stay with me and spend time with me without being supervised by a non-Indigenous person who sits and watches me and degrades me.

[Redacted]



Affirmed by [Redacted] on 26.9.12 in Brisbane in the presence of Aimee McVeigh, solicitor.

[Redacted]

Signature of witness

~~Person taking statement~~