

QUEENSLAND CHILD PROTECTION  
COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

STATEMENT OF SUSAN LAGANA

I, **SUSAN LAGANA**, of c/- 71 Patrick St, Aitkenvale in the State of Queensland, Acting Manager, Aitkenvale Child Safety Service Centre, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, solemnly and sincerely affirm and declare:

1. I am the Acting Manager of the Aitkenvale Child Safety Service Centre (CSSC), Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (the department).
2. I have been an Acting Manager continuously since June 2010, undertaking these duties at the Bowen CSSC, Thuringowa CSSC; Townsville CSSC, Aitkenvale CSSC and the North Queensland Regional Intake Service, including a two week period as Acting Director, Placement Services Unit.
3. When planning and reviewing my work and seeking approval for decisions, when required, I report to the Regional Director, North Queensland who is based in the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services Regional Office in Sturt Street, Townsville.
4. Prior to my managerial appointments I have worked in partnership with the regions leadership team in a range of project positions providing mentoring, support and training for approximately four years in the areas of change management, culture and performance.
5. I commenced employment with the department in August 1981 in the Innisfail Child Safety Service Centre as an Administrative Officer. In 1991 I moved to Townsville and continued my employment with the department across the North Queensland region in a variety of positions from an Administration Officer to Acting Director, Placement Services Unit. Some of these project positions have included state wide project initiatives, maintaining my location in the Townsville area.

**ROLE**

6. The purpose of my role, as Manager is to lead and manage the CSSC in the delivery of child protection services through quality case management and service delivery in partnership with the community.
7. My duties and activities include:
  - providing leadership and management in the delivery of child protection services
  - developing enduring service delivery partnerships to enhance cross-sectoral participation and the delivery and co-ordination of local child protection services
  - managing staff, physical and financial resources in accordance with the department's service delivery framework
  - fostering a culture and philosophy of frontline service delivery to ensure the CSSC continues to meet the department's priorities.

**QUESTIONS**

**Service delivery – how well is child protection functioning?**

Signature of witness to Inquiry \_\_\_\_\_

*S. Lagana*

Signature of person witnessing statement \_\_\_\_\_

*D. J. Donogh*

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8. The Townsville catchment area is serviced by three Child Safety Service Centres – Aitkenvale; Thuringowa; and Townsville which includes a department based hub in Bowen.
9. The Aitkenvale CSSC consists of five teams – one Investigation and Assessment (I&A) team; three teams providing ongoing intervention (OI); and one administration and specialist team. The catchment area includes central suburbs of Townsville and western communities of Charters Towers and Hughenden.
10. The Thuringowa CSSC consists of five teams – one I&A; three teams providing OI; and one administration and specialist team. The catchment area includes the northern suburbs of Townsville and the community of Ingham and Hinchinbrook.
11. The Townsville based CSSC services Palm Island, the Burdekin and a number of Townsville suburbs including the Bowen community. Based in the Townsville office are three teams – one I&A team, one OI team servicing Townsville and Palm Island and a second OI team servicing Townsville and the Burdekin. Palm Island is serviced through a fly in/fly out model, with a presence on the Island three days per week. Additionally, staff are located in the Bowen hub, servicing the Bowen community reporting directly to the Townsville CSSC.
12. The Bowen hub, which is based in Bowen, consists of a team leader, four child safety officers (CSOs), one child safety support officer (CSSO) and two administration officers working across all areas of child protection. Bowen also shares a number of services with the Mackay CSSC for example the Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) team; Evolve; Pathways and Life without Barriers fostering services.
13. The North Queensland Regional Intake Service (NQRIS) is situated in Townsville and provides the primary point of call for reporting child protection concerns for the whole of the North Queensland Region. This service operates between the hours of 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday with the Child Safety After Hours Service responding to matters outside of these hours.
14. The North Queensland Region was one of the first regions to fully operationalise a regional intake service in July 2009. The benefits of Regional Intake Services were recognised across the state and subsequently each region now has a fully operational service.
15. Collaboration with government and non-government agencies remains a key priority for the region. Both formally and informally the region has demonstrated success of productive partnerships noted in such meetings as EVOLVE stakeholder meetings, quarterly stakeholder meetings, complex case clinics, commitment to SCAN team processes and local staff information sessions.
16. The Placement Services Unit (PSU) based in Townsville (with hubs in Mackay and Mount Isa) has recorded an increase in the recruitment of kinship and foster carers. Additionally the region remains at full capacity in all grants funded placement services with particular recruitment strategies occurring around the continued exploration of kinship carers. However, a continued challenge for the region is the recruitment of carers in rural and remote locations, and carers willing to care for children with complex needs.

Signature of witness to Inquiry \_\_\_\_\_

*S. Lagana*

Signature of person witnessing statement \_\_\_\_\_

*D. J. Sonoga*

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As at 31 August 2012

Community	Current Approved Carers				Current Placements				Potential New Carer Numbers		
	AFC	KIN	LTG	TOTAL	Approved Foster Carer	Approved KIN Carer	Residential	TOTAL	Expression of Interest	Applications in progress	TOTAL
Mackay	66	59	11	136	123	80	9	212	12	17	29
Bowen	21	3	2	26	10	6	0	16	4	0	4
Townsville	43	33	1	77	73	52	6	131	9	5	14
Aitkenvale	58	36	11	105	83	55	3	141	15	9	24
Thuringowa	97	36	14	147	117	45	10	172	21	17	38
	285	167	39	491	406	238	28	672	61	48	109

17. The delivery of child protection services throughout the Townsville catchment area has grown and improved. This is demonstrated by:

- intakes recorded and responded to within departmental timeframes
- I&As are prioritised for completion within departmental timeframes
- case plan completion rates are on average at or over target at 87%
- 95% of all children who have been in out of home care for more than thirty days have a child health passport in the Townsville catchment area
- an increase in kinship carers across the region accounts for approximately 28% of all placements in the region (13% increase in twelve months)
- planned and consistent service delivery to outlying catchment areas within the Townsville and wider districts
- CSO training attendance remains high and locally located
- the establishment of a Safehouse on Palm Island and the recruitment of general approved carers on Palm Island
- productive relationships with the Recognise Entity (RE) ensuring culturally appropriate interventions with our young people and families
- partnership information sharing provided by staff to local agencies and reciprocated from local agencies
- full capacity of services in our placement sector, Family Intervention Service (FIS) and Referral for Active Intervention Service (RAI).

**Key regional examples of service delivery and the identification of any other key persons able to speak to the initiatives**

18. The department relies heavily on our non-government partners to deliver quality, timely services which are fiscally responsible and accountable, ensuring tangible outcomes for our families, children and young people. Wee Care Shared Family Care (Wee Care) is an example of such a service. Wee Care is based in Townsville funded to provide 190 foster and kinship placements to children with moderate to high needs across the Townsville catchment area.
19. Wee Care have been operating for 21 years, demonstrating flexibility in their service delivery, by varying their model of care to meet the ever changing needs of the community. Wee Care regularly ensures they maintain strong connections to the wider sector and act to fill the gaps in service deficit areas, such as their alignment with the Angel Identity program and Backpack 4 Aussie Kids.
20. The Angel Identity program is a registered charity raising funds in relation to assisting vulnerable families during times of death within a household. Backpacks 4 Aussie Kids is

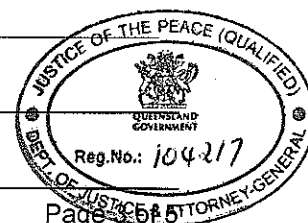
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also a registered charity, founded by Wee Care foster carers with a mission to compile shoes, clothes, toiletries, toys and other care needs into backpacks for children in foster and kinship care. Wee Care is the lead agency aligned with both these projects, responding to the perceived needs for many Child Safety clients.

21. In partnership, the department has worked alongside Wee Care and other sector partners to identify service gaps and respond accordingly to the community need, either through the movement of current grant funding or the use of volunteer/charity organisations.
22. The NQRIS played a key role in community recovery following the devastation of Cyclone Yasi. Due to state wide functionality and cooperation, staff of the NRQIS were able to dedicate a three week period to fulfil community recovery roles to assist the wider community. At this time, the majority of Queensland had been affected by natural disasters and the effective ongoing rostering of staff was pivotal to the success of the recovery efforts. Having a team of staff skilled in making assessments available to provide ongoing support for a three week period was extremely beneficial to support local children and families in North Queensland.

**Agencies, government and non-government that partner with the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services in providing child protection services or related support services**

23. The department works in partnership with many government and non-government agencies in relation to supporting families and protecting children. Some of the non-government agencies in the Townsville area include (but are not limited to):
  - Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service – Recognised Entity, Family Support Services, Youth Shelter and Alternative care.
  - Relationships Australia
  - Red Cross
  - Act for Kids
  - Centacare
  - Lifeline/Uniting Care
  - Volatile Substance Misuse
  - ATODS (Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs)
  - Anglicare
  - Headspace
  - Palm Island Company (PIC)
  - Palm Island Council
  - Mission Australia
24. There are many ways that the department connects with stakeholders, whether this is from an informal referral source through to a formalised case management meeting. For example, key stakeholder meetings are held regularly to discuss integrated case management of young people with complex needs. These types of forums allow for a whole of community coordinated response to address the difficult and complex issues when responding to child protection needs.

**Current challenges – what needs to be fixed and what if any policies and procedures may be negatively impacting on the way business is conducted?**

25. Delivering quality out of home care placements to our children and young people is paramount, with particular reference to the provision of culturally appropriate foster and kinship placements. A barrier to the assessment and approval of many kinship carers in the

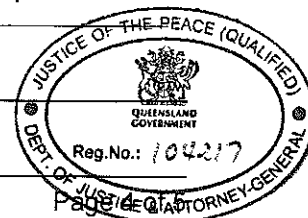
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region is the strict adherence to the current blue card and household member's processes. Currently if any person in the household does not pass the suitability screening of both Central Screening Unit (CSU) and blue card processes, the application to be kinship carers cannot be progressed.

26. The CSU and blue card processes does serve in the identification of people who may pose a risk to our children and young people, however currently there is no provision for any risk management strategies or contextual considerations to be taken into consideration. The department's current legislation and policies/procedure only allow for two options a) removal of the children from the household and b) non-approval of the carer application. If provisions were made in relation to further assessments by the department acknowledging the history of concerning information, details of the events and current situation to be considered, it is envisaged many more kinship carer applications would be approved, permitting children to remain in family based kinship arrangements. This change in process could align with current practices in regards to risk and safety assessments that the department conducts throughout all parts of the child protection continuum.
27. Of equal importance but in contrast to the placement of children, is timely and effective early intervention to families, ensuring removal of children is the last resort. Currently the NQRIS and CSSCs provide direct referrals to funded community services, with the Communities Service stream administering and monitoring the funding.
28. The North Queensland Region has commissioned a discrete project to provide collaborative interagency responses to families at risk of entering the child protection system. The Townsville Family Support Alliance (TFSA) works with government and non government partners to provide intensive case management and support to at risk families through the Supporting Upper Ross Families (SURF) initiative.

Declared before me at Townsville this 18th day of September 2012.

*L. Hagana*  
Luen Joy Sonogon  
JP Qualified *L. J. Sonogon*



Signature of witness to Inquiry \_\_\_\_\_

*L. Hagana*

Signature of person witnessing statement \_\_\_\_\_

*L. J. Sonogon JP Qualified*

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