



## Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland

### Submission to the Child Protection Commission of Inquiry- September 2012

The Ethnic Communities Council Queensland<sup>1</sup> (ECCQ), is the peak body in Queensland for multiculturalism and is active in developing policy which seeks the advancement of an inclusive society in Queensland. The policy platform provides pertinent research and best practice solutions to the issues that confront Culturally And Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background communities. Part of this role is reflected in numerous policy working groups which are convened within the community sector, such as the Multicultural Child Protection Working Group (MCPWG) that has been advocating for improved services for CALD background families for many years. As the facilitator of this group, the Child Safety Policy Officer is also a member of the Queensland Child Protection Partnership Forum<sup>2</sup>. This submission has been developed in consultation with the members of the MCPWG and various other networks and peak bodies including the policy development processes of ECCQ. In particular ECCQ would like to draw the Commission's attention to a joint report with PeakCare entitled 'Culture Matters' (2010) which outlines local research into the needs of CALD background families within in the child safety system.<sup>3</sup>

This submission will concentrate on the major issues which are pertinent to the Commission's tasks as listed in 3.1, 3.2,3.3 and item 6.1. This current Commission of Inquiry is charged with:

- making a 'full and open inquiry' into 'the effectiveness of Queensland's current child protection system';

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.eccq.com.au](http://www.eccq.com.au)

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/childsafety/partners/child-protection-partnership-forum>  
( Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

<sup>3</sup> See <http://peakcare.org.au/files/cms/files/CultureMattersFINALREPORT%28%29.pdf>  
(Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

- examining ‘whether the current use of resources across the child protection system is adequate’;
- considering the government’s ‘response to children and families in the child protection system’, and ‘the tertiary child protection interventions’ and transition arrangements for young people who exist the system.
- The Commission is also asked to ‘chart a new road map for Queensland’s child protection system over the next decade’.<sup>4</sup>

ECCQ advises that the terms ‘child safety’, ‘child protection’, ‘child and family wellbeing’ and ‘child welfare’ can be unclear in their definitions and can be used somewhat interchangeably across jurisdictions and within the literature. Terms such as ‘child safety’ and ‘child protection’ have become incredibly confused within the Queensland context because the underlying paradigm is one of child rescue and removal of children. This can lead to an over reliance on rather simplistic and false dichotomies that structure decisions as being two dimensional– child versus parent , good versus bad parenting, safe versus unsafe families etc. In reality, family dynamics are extremely complex and volatile. Testro and Petola have outlined the issues involved in this type of philosophy in their paper ‘Rethinking Child Protection’<sup>5</sup>. They argue for a child wellbeing model that involves a radical shift from government led responses to community empowerment. This approach is supported by many commentators and research.

In this submission, ECCQ will use ‘child safety’ to refer to a system that concentrates effort on the tertiary end of the intervention spectrum. This involves activities predicated on a worldview that gives preference to the removal of children from their families rather than work with those parents and extended family/community members to ensure that the child’s needs are being met within their home. In this type of system resources are expended to support children to move out of their homes and intervention is aimed, generally, at the alternatives selected for those children. This is the emphasis within the current system in Queensland. However ‘child protection’ and ‘child and family well being’ are terms which refer to a system designed to support children and their families so that early detection and remedy of vulnerabilities are addressed in order to keep families together and connected with their extended support mechanisms. Thus, more resources are invested in processes which remedy the issues (at an individual and community level) that drive vulnerability towards high risk and therefore into the tertiary Out Of Home Care system (OOHC). OOHC is a very expensive ‘remedy’ for child vulnerability and the outcomes are poor for the individual and society. The work of Prilleltensky<sup>6</sup>, Melton<sup>7</sup> and others argue a

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<sup>4</sup> See [http://www.childprotectioninquiry.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/156155/Child-Protection-Inquiry-Order-in-Council.pdf](http://www.childprotectioninquiry.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/156155/Child-Protection-Inquiry-Order-in-Council.pdf) (Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

<sup>5</sup> See Testro P and Peltola C (2007) ‘ Rethinking Child Protection: A New Paradigm?’ discussion paper prepared for PeakCare, Queensland  
[http://www.cafwaa.org.au/Rethinking\\_Child\\_Protection\\_2007.pdf](http://www.cafwaa.org.au/Rethinking_Child_Protection_2007.pdf) (Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> August 2012)  
 and

Petola, C and Testro, P (2006) ‘ Towards a better future for children: Preventing child abuse and neglect.’ National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect.

<sup>6</sup> Prilleltensky, I and Nelson, G (2000) ‘Promoting Child and Family Wellness: Priorities for Psychological and Social Interventions’. *Journal of Community and Applied Social psychology*. Vol 10.pp85 – 105 and

strong case for better early intervention services and community based responses (i.e. a child protection and well being system) and ECCQ believes that this will benefit all families including those with a CALD background. ECCQ further believes that it is important for the Commission of Inquiry to address the issues that are driving up the numbers in the OOHC system as a part of the considerations for the next ten years.

The current system of 'child safety' which resulted from the implementation of the recommendations of the Crime and Misconduct Commission Inquiry report (2004), has developed into a regime which is risk averse and which will eventually capture a sizable minority of Queensland's children within its ambit. It is unsustainable and costly for the State. Many jurisdictions in Australia and overseas have been caught in this trap of developing overly risk averse systems that ultimately damage significant numbers of vulnerable families<sup>8</sup>. The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020<sup>9</sup> (the National Framework) sets out the need to shift the dominant national paradigm to one of family and child well being. This is a relatively complex set of proposals but this will ultimately result in cost savings for government and an improved service system for families.<sup>10</sup>

Increasingly forensic parent- blaming, risk averse child safety paradigms are being exposed as dangerous and harmful to children. Without universal, holistic well-being and family support services the threshold for statutory intervention will remain low as families drift into the tertiary OOHC system in ever increasing numbers. Many studies show that there are lifelong significant disadvantages for children who have been removed from their families – including increased likelihood of drug and alcohol addiction, mental health problems, early pregnancy, imprisonment, low educational attainment<sup>11</sup> and increased use of medical services<sup>12</sup>. This is hardly a ringing endorsement of the State care system's ability to keep children safe.

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Melton, G B (2005) 'Mandated reporting: a policy without reason.' *Child Abuse and neglect*. Vol 29, pp 9-18

<sup>7</sup> See [http://www.clemson.edu/public/ifnl/projects\\_grants/strong\\_communities/index.html](http://www.clemson.edu/public/ifnl/projects_grants/strong_communities/index.html) (Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> September 2012)

<sup>8</sup> See Australian Institute of Family Studies 2012, 'The economic costs of child abuse and neglect - Child Family Community Australia' also Wood (2008) 'Report of the Special Commission of Inquiry in Child Protection Services', NSW at

[http://www.dpc.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/33796/Volume\\_1\\_-\\_Special\\_Commission\\_of\\_Inquiry\\_into\\_Child\\_Protection\\_Services\\_in\\_New\\_South\\_Wales.pdf](http://www.dpc.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/33796/Volume_1_-_Special_Commission_of_Inquiry_into_Child_Protection_Services_in_New_South_Wales.pdf)

(Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2012) and

Munro (2011) 'The Munro review of Child protection' UK at

[http://www.education.gov.uk/munroreview/downloads/8875\\_DfE\\_Munro\\_Report\\_TAGGED.pdf](http://www.education.gov.uk/munroreview/downloads/8875_DfE_Munro_Report_TAGGED.pdf)

(Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2012)

<sup>9</sup> Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009- 2020

<sup>10</sup> See Higgins, D . 2011 'Protecting Children: evolving systems'.

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/fm2011/fm89/fm89a.html> (Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

<sup>11</sup> See The Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, 2012. 'Snapshot Report'. Page 129. This indicates that child in care perform worse in NAPLAN testing than the State average and than ATSI children.

<sup>12</sup> Raman,S. Inder,B. and Forbes, C (2005) ' Investing for Success: The economics of supporting young people leaving care.' Centre for excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Melbourne.

This submission will concentrate on issues within the current system which impact significantly on CALD background families and their children. However, ECCQ believes that improving the service system for one group of users will in fact improve it for all. Effective, well- resourced services are going to be more helpful for all users including those with a CALD background. The submission will:

- focus on the need for a paradigm shift to family well- being and give examples of programs which can useful in developing this,
- consider the planning and service provision implications of the paucity of data collected about CALD background families within the family support and child protection systems
- suggest models of practice which will result in better outcomes for families and children, including those from a CALD background
- discuss the workforce and leadership issues which will result from both the changes recommended and the social context in which these changes will take place and
- make some suggestions about changes to the Child Protection Act 1999 which will enhance services for CALD background families and children.

### **The need for a new paradigm.**

ECCQ considers that the Queensland Government should implement an improved service system of integrated, early intervention and prevention services for all families in Queensland and especially services, which can enhance the capacity of the service system to support the needs of all families including those with a CALD background. Children and families from refugee backgrounds in particular have increased vulnerability and need improved and tailored support to prevent engagement with the child safety system.<sup>13</sup> In 2010, PeakCare and ECCQ released a report that outlined the significant issues faced by CALD background families when they entered the child safety system.<sup>14</sup> These issues include:

- paucity of comprehensible information about the legal and social expectations of parents within the Australian context
- deficient cultural sensitivity and understanding of the settlement processes within the child safety workforce
- poor communication between child safety and protection staff and parents which leads to confusion, frustration and anger
- inadequately developed models of practice and program logic to encompass diversity within client groups and
- a lack of general engagement with families and communities to ensure that child well being was central to decision making.

There is a growing realisation in many jurisdictions, that preventing families and children from entry into the statutory care system at the earliest possible stage, is

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<sup>13</sup> Multicultural Development Association 2010, 'Queensland's child protection system: Systemic challenges for people from refugee and CALD backgrounds'

<sup>14</sup> PeakCare 2010' Culture Matters' at <http://peakcare.org.au/files/cms/files/CultureMattersFINALREPORT%282%29.pdf> (Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2012)

critical. The National Framework emphasises that Australia's services need to be better aligned to support family and child well being rather than removal of children from their families. Queensland would benefit from adopting a more preventative and supportive framework over time rather than relying on a system that waits until children need to be removed before services become available to vulnerable families. A better resourced child protection system will reduce demand within the child safety system and lead to improved outcomes for children who are removed from their families.

ECCQ supports a more proactive community development approach to keeping children safe and well. The creation of sustainable, strength based services that empower communities to care for their children are, in the longer term, more effective than short term reactions. The development of a holistic service system design that delivers accessible interventions needs to underpin any child well being service system to ensure that all parents are supported in their nurturing role. Where there is evidence of unacceptable risks to children, targeted programs can work more intensively with such families. In this way, removal of children from their families will be recommended *only* where it has been evaluated that sustainable change is not possible. At that point children in OOHC should be given stability and therapeutic interventions in sufficient depth so that their trauma can be ameliorated. A well- resourced tertiary sector can help to prevent further abuse of children and young people who are in the statutory care system<sup>15</sup>. Currently, the tertiary system is overloaded and in danger of inflicting further harm and trauma on children because of this. The findings outlined in the Kaur (2012) report indicate increased vulnerability amongst some CALD background communities because of an overextended child safety service system.<sup>16</sup>

The well being framework outlined below<sup>17</sup> will improve outcomes for children and their families in the general population and reduce numbers in the statutory system. ECCQ urges the Commission to use this opportunity to design a child protection system in Queensland, which is proactive and develops practice interventions to support families to undertake their parenting role. ECCQ supports the consideration of new programs and the expansion of current proven ones that concentrate on accessibility and integration of services. This is commonly referred to as a public health model and relies on differentiated responses to increasing vulnerability<sup>18</sup>. Generally, the model promotes targeted responses to child and family vulnerability as well as relying on universal support within the general population to improve society's capacity to care for children.

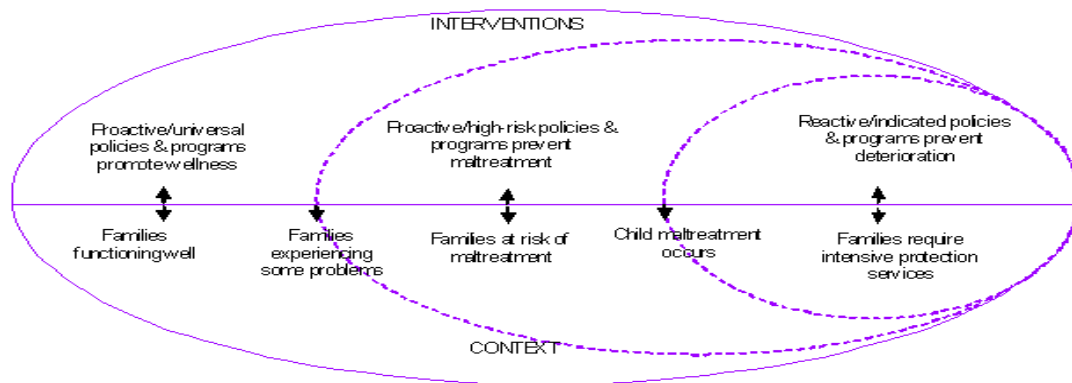
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<sup>15</sup> See AIFS fact sheet on OOHC 2012  
<http://www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/pubs/factsheets/a142092/index.html#a7> (Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

<sup>16</sup> See Kaur, J. 2012 'Cultural Diversity and Child Protection,  
[http://www.jkdiversityconsultants.com.au/Cultural\\_Diversity\\_&\\_Child\\_Protection\\_Kaur2012\\_A4.pdf](http://www.jkdiversityconsultants.com.au/Cultural_Diversity_&_Child_Protection_Kaur2012_A4.pdf) (Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

<sup>17</sup> Prilleltensky, I., Nelson, G. & Pierson., L. Promoting Family Wellness and Preventing Child Maltreatment. University of Toronto Press 2001. p 13

<sup>18</sup> See Hunter, C. 2011 'Defining the public health model for the child welfare services context' NCPCC resource sheet, <http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/sheets/rs11/index.html>



The welfare services in Queensland have been heavily oriented towards the tertiary part of the system since the CMC Inquiry and this has resulted in support services being made available only to foster carers or to birth families who reach breaking point and who are on the cusp of having their children removed from their care. Even the ‘Helping Out Families’ project in South East Queensland has been designed to service high risk families. The long waiting lists for these services attest to the unmet need for family support services that are more readily available to families when they need them. ‘Soft entry’, differentiated support services for families would reduce significantly the numbers of children needing to enter the OOHC system.<sup>19</sup>

Universal and targeted support services need to be provided in sufficient quantity and quality to allow in-depth long-term interventions to vulnerable children and their families when required. Services need to be relationship based and individualised to encourage participation by hard to reach families, as well as having sufficient resources to undertake outreach to isolated communities and families. CALD background families are especially sensitive to the need to build lasting and inclusive relationships which should be flexible and step up support and interventions when necessary. There are numerous examples of programs where successful interventions have promoted healthy and safe environments so that children can remain within their families and communities. Drug and alcohol treatment services are vital to ensure accessible and timely treatment for adults and young people who become dependant. Delay in treatment can adversely affect family well being and lead to violence and other family stresses all of which impact on the well being of children and young people. The links between

<sup>19</sup> See McArthur, M., & Thomson, L. 2011 ‘ Families’ views on a coordinated family support service in Family Matters no. 89, 2011

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/fm2011/fm89/fm89h.html>

And from the UK

[http://www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/families/physicalmentalhealth/files/physical\\_mental\\_health\\_full\\_knowledge\\_review.pdf](http://www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/families/physicalmentalhealth/files/physical_mental_health_full_knowledge_review.pdf) ( Both accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

Early indicators of HOF point towards a downward impact on re-reporting numbers within the HOF catchment areas.

domestic violence and the threat to child well being and safety are well known. ECCQ believes that adequate services for both the victims and perpetrators of violence need to be readily available within an integrated service system.

Listed in Appendix A are some examples of relevant programs which have been assessed to work well and which can be modified for the Queensland context. The examples from Australia have been chosen because their success has been evaluated or because of their similarity to programs from overseas, which have been evaluated as effective. The development of a family well being framework is an opportunity to change the paradigm and promote program development in support of maintaining healthy families and communities.

**ECCQ recommends program development in three key areas;**

- **Universal and intensive targeted family support services**
- **Accessible and universal maternal and child health services**
- **Community and family based services for early intervention including drug and alcohol and domestic violence.**

**Accurate data collection**

The delivery and evaluation of successful practice models and programs within the service system require that purchasers and those delivering services build on accurate data that help to mould programs and plan for the future. ECCQ sees that one major issue is the lack of relevant data within the system about the CALD background status of clients. ECCQ is keen to pursue the implementation of processes to better support appropriate service provision to CALD background clients by the collection and sharing of relevant data. If the service system does not know the backgrounds of its clients, it cannot plan appropriately nor tailor services to meet the needs of the population. ECCQ submits that CALD background data is important because the 2011 census data<sup>20</sup> indicate that 26.3% of Queenslanders have both parents born overseas. This attests that CALD background children and their families are a potentially significant client group for service providers within the health and welfare systems. There is a lack of data collected by the Department of Community, Child Safety and Disabilities (the Department) by which to gauge if practice models and services are appropriate for families with a CALD background. The Department's client management system was recently modified to collect relevant cultural data but this will not be reported on for some time and its completion on the system is not mandated. ECCQ urges that the Commission recommend mandatory data collection to ensure better accuracy and more appropriate case planning and service delivery to CALD background clients. Further, the adoption of a work culture that actively promotes meaningful data collection and use needs to be advanced to ensure that operational staff understand its importance to the provision of good practice. The Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian (CCYPCG) through its Community Visitor program now

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<sup>20</sup> See

[http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/3?opendocument&navpos=220](http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/3?opendocument&navpos=220) ( Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> September 2012)

collects data on the CALD status of children and young people whom they visit. In time, this will develop a picture of the cultural needs of children in the OOHC system. Increasingly CALD background families are entering the child safety system and this presents significant challenges for individuals, families, communities, service providers and government. The system needs to be proactive in developing practice models that will work well with an increasing diverse population.

Within the CALD area the need for improved capture of relevant cultural and background data is imperative. ECCQ recommends:

- better co ordination of government data and reporting,
- oversight of data collection and compilation by the Queensland Children's Commission and Child Guardian to ensure that the data is collected and reported on,
- the publication of aggregate data to help with planning and
- that government is transparent about what data they use to make decisions about service provision, practice models to be funded and locations selected.

Whilst it is not possible to determine at this time if CALD background children are over or under represented in the numbers of children in the care system, we have anecdotal evidence suggesting that lack of good data is leading to significant errors in the investigation of and intervention with families from a CALD background. This is because child safety investigators do not take into account the cultural issues of the families with whom they are working.

The current service system is blind to the needs of CALD background families and children because relevant cultural background data is not routinely collected and so services tend to provide a 'one size fits all' set of interventions. In order to be supportive of CALD background families and children, the child safety and child protection service systems should:

- be easily accessible to CALD background clients by offering multiple 'soft entry'<sup>21</sup> points which will encourage participation and respect differences in child rearing and other family practices
- provide free skilled professional interpreter services when required and trained staff who know how to work with interpreters<sup>22</sup>
- provide translated materials for parents and community leaders and the expertise to unpack the messages into culturally relevant concepts
- provide cultural support for the workforce to ensure support for cultural competency<sup>23</sup>
- encourage longer term and intensive service provision to ensure families are well supported to settle in Australia and to understand their role in a new culture and legal framework

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<sup>21</sup> 'Soft entry' refers to accessible non- stigmatising services, which are frequently but not always, universal.

<sup>22</sup> See Queensland Accessing Interpreters Working group, 2008, ' A matter of interpretation'

<sup>23</sup> See <http://www.eccq.com.au/what-we-do/policy/child-protection/resources-for-cald-clients-and-child-protection> - a resource guide based on the findings of the Culture Matters report. (Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012)



- offer out reach to newly arrived CALD background clients to ensure that families are comfortable in using services and understand the complexity of service provision in Australia<sup>24</sup>
- have a well supported, trained<sup>25</sup> and culturally diverse workforce to better reflect the needs of the clients and to promote culturally sensitive services.

### **Models of practice to better enhance family well being**

A well resourced service system which promotes child and family well being needs to be based on models of practice which enhance strengths of families and communities and promote accessible support in a timely manner. There are several crucial underlying elements that need to be incorporated into successful practice models. These are:

- strong integration of services at a local place based level, to support a seamless client centred service system where the welfare of families and children are central to planning and service delivery.
- facilitation of service co-ordination and integration as a funded and central part of the service system design. Currently this is not funded and is dependant on the good will of workers. Service system co-ordination is different to case management.<sup>26</sup>
- assurance of adequate resources and financial support to be able to plan for service availability in the longer term so that experienced staff can be retained and services are seen as reliable by communities ( i.e. the funding model needs to reflect long term planning within the service system)
- availability of intensive interventions when required which have been evaluated and found to be effective<sup>27</sup>

ECCQ recommends that the Commission promotes practice models which can develop a better understanding of family well being and the effects of trauma on the development of children. The current dominant practice model of child rescue, coupled with parent blaming has resulted in increasing family dislocation and separation, blaming mothers for their partner's violence and alienation of children from their cultural heritage. The numerous reports by the CCYPCG attest to the impact of the current practices on the overall wellbeing of children within the OOHC system. Importantly, recently it reports that many children visited by

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<sup>24</sup> An example of this work can be found at [http://www.sydneyr.det.nsw.edu.au/Equity/Projects/project\\_FamiliesInCulturalTransition.html](http://www.sydneyr.det.nsw.edu.au/Equity/Projects/project_FamiliesInCulturalTransition.html) ( Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

<sup>25</sup> See <http://www.eccq.com.au/what-we-do/cultural-competence> as an example of cultural awareness training (Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

<sup>26</sup> See ARACY 2009 [http://www.eccq.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/inverting-the-pyramid\\_2009.pdf](http://www.eccq.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/inverting-the-pyramid_2009.pdf) (Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

<sup>27</sup> See [www.c4eo.org.uk/](http://www.c4eo.org.uk/) ( Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> August 2012)) and <http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/issues/issues24/issues24.html> ( Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

their CCYPCG Community Visitor want greater contact with their extended family and community, have unmet needs in relation to their health, education and cultural needs and require greater stability within their OOHC placement options.<sup>28</sup> Whilst these measures have been improving slowly over time, the increased reliance on residential care in Queensland indicates that the OOHC system is under significant stress due to the burgeoning numbers of children who are admitted to OOHC. Changes to the models of practice would lead to improved placement options if more children remained outside the OOHC system and were able to access better support within their families and communities. To achieve this, the practice models used within the family well being system need to be more cognisant of family and community strengths and better able to provide individualised interventions that have been assessed to be effective.<sup>29</sup> Practice models need to enhance service coordination and integration<sup>30</sup>.

System integration is a complex but necessary element to a successful practice model to address the specific needs of CALD background children and families. ECCQ and the MCPWG are seeking the provision of proactive leadership, training and support for cultural competency development, as well as advice and access to resources for the Department's workforce. Ideally, this would take the form of a state-wide dedicated Multicultural Unit<sup>31</sup> within the Department. This unit can coordinate information collection and distribution, training and practice model development and lead to the introduction of locally based bi cultural workers. Currently, a model of joint planning and resourcing between government and non-government service providers is practiced at a regional level within the Regional Planning and Partnership Program (PPP) that was an initiative of the Commission of Inquiry in 2004. This program is well suited to focus on the development of localised regional responses to the needs of and local planning for, culturally sensitive service delivery and cultural competence. Such enhancement to the service system has been recommended for some time.<sup>32</sup> An example of a focussed approach to this work at a local level is in the Beenleigh /Logan area.

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<sup>28</sup> See <http://www.ccypcg.qld.gov.au/resources/publications/childGuardian/Child-Guardian-Report-Child-Protection-System-2009-10.html> ( Accessed 27th August 2012)

<sup>29</sup> See Child and Family Community Australia 2012 'Safe and Supportive families and communities for children'. CFC paper No 1.

<sup>30</sup> See McDonald, M., & Rosier, K. 'Interagency collaboration. Part B, Does collaboration benefit children and families? - exploring the evidence'. AFRC briefing no. 21-B, 2011 <http://www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/pubs/briefing/b021/index.html> and McDonald, M., & Rosier, K. [Interagency collaboration. Part A, What is it, what does it look like, when is it needed and what supports it?](http://www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/pubs/briefing/b021/b021-aa.html)

AFRC briefing no. 21-A, 2011 <http://www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/pubs/briefing/b021/b021-aa.html> ( Both accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

<sup>31</sup> An example of this model can be viewed at NSW Department of Community Services, *Multicultural Strategic Commitment 2008 - 2013 (2008)* <[http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/\\_assets/main/documents/multicultural\\_strategic\\_commitment.pdf](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/multicultural_strategic_commitment.pdf) (Accessed 28th August 2012)

<sup>32</sup> See 'Changing the Wheels: Child Safety Concerns in Multicultural Qld: An Issues paper for the Department of Child Safety (2005), accessed online: [http://www.mdainc.org.au/reports/Changing\\_the\\_Wheels.pdf](http://www.mdainc.org.au/reports/Changing_the_Wheels.pdf) and Culture Matters by PEAKCARE & ECCQ (2010) [http://www.peakcare.org.au/media/user\\_files/documents/Reports/7\\_Report\\_Culture\\_Matters\\_15.12.10.pdf](http://www.peakcare.org.au/media/user_files/documents/Reports/7_Report_Culture_Matters_15.12.10.pdf)  
MDA Queensland

ECCQ and MCPWG suggest that to be effective the practice model to support cultural inclusion within the system needs to be capable of:

- engagement with CALD background communities to ascertain their unique needs and provision of information and referrals to foster and kinship carers
- ensuring the delivery of interpreting and culturally appropriate support services<sup>33</sup>
- training child safety officers/staff and developing resources to build a culturally competent organisation and service delivery system
- establishing culturally competent recruitment practices i.e. multicultural caseworkers
- supporting multicultural liaison/bicultural support officers (if they were to be introduced)
- advising the Department and Queensland Government on child protection policy and practice for culturally diverse communities
- improving the accurate and timely collection of data and the reporting of CALD client profiles for planning purposes and
- providing updates and ongoing education and information in relation to existing and new and emerging communities settling in Queensland (for example, the Burmese ethnic minorities including the Rohingya, Chin and Karen)

The models of practice that will best suit a diverse population are those that can be flexible in customising services for individual families. The current practices of the Helping Out Families and Referral for Active Intervention services are well suited for the provision of customised services because they include a capacity for integration of services and the disbursement of some flexible funds for purchasing services and other items relevant to the needs of the families as assessed at engagement. This need for flexibility is supported within the research.<sup>34</sup>

ECCQ recommends practice improvement to increase and develop the facilitation of safe reunifications. This can be achieved by improving access to early intervention programs<sup>35</sup>, family support and practical training for birth families and more flexibility in the use of funds for other support mechanisms such as peer support, the engagement of youth workers and better (fast track) access to mental health, alcohol and drug and domestic violence support services.<sup>36</sup>

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Queensland's child protection system: Systemic challenges for people from refugee and CALD backgrounds <http://www.mdainc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/mda-child-protection-position-paper-november-2010.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> See Queensland Accessing Interpreters Working group, 2008, 'A matter of interpretation'

<sup>34</sup> See Child and family Community Australia 2012 'Safe and Supportive families and communities for children'. CFC paper No 1.

<sup>35</sup> See C4EO report entitled 'Grasping the nettle' which looks at programs which work in the UK. [http://www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/earlyintervention/files/early\\_intervention\\_grasping\\_the\\_nettle\\_executive\\_summary.pdf](http://www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/earlyintervention/files/early_intervention_grasping_the_nettle_executive_summary.pdf) (Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012).

<sup>36</sup> See research from the UK which indicates supporting parents improves the well being of children. <http://www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/families/default.aspx?themeid=4&accesstypeid=1> (Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

Increased flexibility in OOHC models e.g. kinship/community care so that community expectation and mores are matched with models of recruitment and support rather than reliance on the current 'stranger' care model will enhance the capacity of the OOHC system to support reunification or stabilise placements. Practice models that use multi dimensional approaches will be better suited to support diversity within a family and child well being service system. There is a suite of papers prepared by the Australian Institute of Family Studies for the Victorian Department of Human Services that indicate practice models and issues which have been drawn from research and give guidance to staff about decisions and interventions that need to be considered when interacting with clients.<sup>37</sup> ECCQ commends this approach to model development and staff training.

### **Workforce and leadership solutions to drive changes.**

There are numerous reports indicating that Australia and other first world countries will experience a dramatic workforce shortage within the next five or so years as the aging baby boomers leave paid employment. The Workforce Council, Queensland has compiled a report outlining the issues for the community services sector which was published in June 2012.<sup>38</sup> This indicates that workforce stability is threatened on a number of fronts: the increased numbers of children and families entering the welfare system (i.e. increased demand for services), the negative public perception of work within the child safety sector, the ageing workforce and the increased competition for staff from other industries. A complicating factor, especially for government departments, is the reliance on diverse qualifications within the child safety workforce rather building expertise within a few relevant professional groups. The decentralised nature of Queensland's service system also impacts negatively on the ability of service providers to have appropriately qualified and skilled staff at every service outlet. Within the current system, a relatively high staff turnover impacts on the capacity of the Department and non- government agencies to maintain expertise in culturally competent practice. This exacerbates the inherent stress of the work for workers and negatively affects the system's ability to support new staff.

In order to build the workforce capacity to deliver culturally appropriate and skilled services within an increasingly complex service system and with highly traumatised service users, ECCQ suggests several initiatives to improve the workforce skills base. These include:

- development of leadership based programs to fully prepare workers in the child and family welfare sector for supervisory, management and community leadership positions. An example of proactive work in the area is the Benevolent Society's Social Leadership Program.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> see [http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/721880/Families-with-multiple-and-complex-needs-specialist-resource.pdf](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/721880/Families-with-multiple-and-complex-needs-specialist-resource.pdf) and [http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/720597/children-their-families-specialist-prctice-resource-2012.pdf](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/720597/children-their-families-specialist-prctice-resource-2012.pdf) and [http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/590999/infants-their-families-specialist-practice-resource-2012.pdf](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/590999/infants-their-families-specialist-practice-resource-2012.pdf) (Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

<sup>38</sup> See Workforce Council 2012, 'Industry Skills and Workforce Development Report'.

<sup>39</sup> See <http://www.bensoc.org.au/director/sla.cfm> (Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

- expansion of Community of Practice<sup>40</sup> (CoP) groups which can be locally based and focussed on child and family welfare issues. These can help to develop local consistency of practice and strong professional networks to support new workers. The Family Inclusion Network has developed a CoP in South East Queensland which uses the Community Door website to communicate and disseminate information<sup>41</sup>
- modification and expansion of the role of the current Queensland Child Protection State Wide Partnership Forum which has its origins in the recommendations of the 2004 Inquiry. It was set up as a Taskforce to oversee the changes in the system towards the implementation of the recommendations embedded in the findings of that Inquiry. The current State-wide Forum needs to be tasked with overseeing and leading the changes to the system which are required to promote a child and family well being paradigm. The ability of all parts of the system to work together to research, promote and integrate state-wide strategic planning and service program implementation will provide a strong leadership element that can drive change across all levels of government, community services and the private sector. The central planning body (currently the State-wide Forum) needs to be replicated at regional levels to better embed implementation and the promotion of local initiatives.

### **The Child Protection Act 1999 (The Act)**

ECCQ commends the Child Placement Principle<sup>42</sup> that embeds the need for workers to consider the placement of children of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent with appropriate persons and to ensure that these children are well connected with their culture. ECCQ recommends that similar provisions be provided for CALD background children and families, including the need for staff to seek appropriate cultural guidance at decision-making points within the child safety and protection systems. This will enshrine the practice of attaining relevant cultural knowledge when there is a need to investigate, assess, intervene, plan for and remove children with a CALD background.

ECCQ considers that the Act which governs child protection and well being within the State should have as its underpinning, principles and elements which rely on the UNCROC Declaration.<sup>43</sup> This is especially important when considering principles that will more strenuously include the child's family in decisions regarding safety and wellbeing and the views of children and young people in planning their future.

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<sup>40</sup> See <http://www.ewenger.com/theory/> for more information on the uses of COP. (Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

<sup>41</sup> Family Inclusion Network, 'Final report 2011-2012' to the Department of Communities, Child Safety and disability Services.

<sup>42</sup> Child Protection Act 1999, section 83.

<sup>43</sup> See <http://www.myd.govt.nz/documents/working-with-young-people/uncroc/2006-07-appendix-1-uncroc-summary-table.pdf> (Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

ECCQ considers that the Act should be drafted to represent a better balance between the 'best interests' of the child and the more holistic view of child and family well being.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> See Prilleltensky, I. and Prilleltensky, O. (2006) *Promoting Wellbeing*. John Wiley and Sons, Canada.

## Appendix A

These examples are but a brief introduction to the wealth of well researched best practice programs that are available as source material for program development. ECCQ recommends that the Commission proposes the adoption of a much more proactive and creative set of parameters for tackling the support of vulnerable families in Queensland into the future. The current expenditure on forensic tertiary interventions will cause increased harm to Queensland's children. The development of a preventative approach is an opportunity to stem the tide of vulnerable families entering the tertiary system by increasing the community's capacity to support children and to keep them safe. Significant investment now can reap the rewards of savings in the future.

### Universal and targeted intensive family support services

- **Child-Parent Centres** - The Chicago Child-Parent Centres (CPCs) provide comprehensive educational support and family support to economically disadvantaged children and their parents. The guiding principle of the program is that by providing a school-based, stable learning environment during preschool and during kindergarten through third grade, in which parents are active and consistent participants in their child's education, scholastic success will follow. The program requires parental participation and emphasises a child-centred, individualised approach to social and cognitive development<sup>45</sup>. In Inala, the Pathways to Prevention program<sup>46</sup> has demonstrated that school based interventions can improve outcomes for disadvantaged families and their children in many facets of their lives. Elsewhere in Queensland the holistic services provided through the Early Years Centres demonstrate 'soft entry' integrated family support and the centre in Cairns (which is operated by The Benevolent Society) has successfully partnered with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander service providers to develop better multicultural services.<sup>47</sup>
- **Healthy Families New York (HFNY)** - Based on the national Healthy Families America (HFA) model, HFNY is a community-based prevention program that seeks to improve the health and well-being of children at risk of abuse and neglect by providing intensive home visitation services. The target population consists of expectant parents and parents with an infant less than three months of age who are considered to be at high risk for child abuse and neglect. Specially trained paraprofessionals are assigned to the participating families to deliver home visitation services until the child reaches five or is enrolled in Head Start or kindergarten. Home visitors provide families with support, education, and referrals to community services aimed at addressing the following goals: 1) to

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<sup>45</sup> See <http://www.promisingpractices.net/program.asp?programid=98> (Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

<sup>46</sup> See Mission Australia and Griffith University 'Pathways to Prevention Project . The first five years 1999 to 2004'

<sup>47</sup> See [http://www.bensoc.org.au/director/whatwedo/findaservice.cfm?item\\_id=7E878713B551B6A71F6E7C0361705C93](http://www.bensoc.org.au/director/whatwedo/findaservice.cfm?item_id=7E878713B551B6A71F6E7C0361705C93) (Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

promote positive parenting skills and parent-child interaction; 2) to prevent child abuse and neglect; 3) to ensure optimal prenatal care and child health and development; and 4) to increase parents' self-sufficiency.<sup>48</sup>

- **Parent Education programs** that promote caring and positive parenting behaviours such as Queensland's Triple P Program. The program uses flexible delivery modalities (including individual face-to-face, group, telephone-assisted and self-directed programs) to tailor the strength and format of the intervention to the requirements of individual families. Its multi-disciplinary, preventive and community-wide focus gives the program wide reach, permitting the targeting of de-stigmatised access points through primary care services for families who are reluctant to participate in parenting skills programs.<sup>49</sup> In Brisbane, the Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT) have offered parenting programs which have been specially formulated for CALD background parents, (POUCH). An internal evaluation has demonstrated successful outcomes using this approach.<sup>50</sup>
  
- **Incredible Years Series** – This is a set of comprehensive curricula targeting children age 2 to 10 years old and their parents and teachers. The curricula are designed to work jointly to promote emotional and social competence and to prevent, reduce, and treat children's behavioural and emotional problems.<sup>51</sup>
  
- **Family Check-Up**– The Family Check-Up is a rapid, comprehensive family assessment. It demonstrates that embedding family interventions within agencies such as public schools and early years projects is feasible and cost effective. The results seem to reflect some classic public health principles, with the families most at risk being the most likely to engage devised by the Child and Family Centre at the University of Oregon <sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> See <http://www.promisingpractices.net/program.asp?programid=147> ( Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

<sup>49</sup> See [http://www.triplep.net/files/pdf/Parenting\\_Research\\_and\\_Practice\\_Monograph\\_No.1.pdf](http://www.triplep.net/files/pdf/Parenting_Research_and_Practice_Monograph_No.1.pdf) (Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

<sup>50</sup> See [http://www.qpastt.org.au/whatwedo\\_servicesPrograms.html](http://www.qpastt.org.au/whatwedo_servicesPrograms.html) (Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> September 2012)

<sup>51</sup> See <http://www.promisingpractices.net/program.asp?programid=134> (Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

<sup>52</sup> See <http://www.preventionaction.org/bringing-prevention-services-home-family> (Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012)



## Accessible and universal maternal and child health services

- **Nurse Family Partnership**- The Nurse Family Partnership program provides home visits by registered nurses to first-time mothers, beginning during pregnancy and continuing through to the child's second birthday. The program has three primary goals: (1) to improve pregnancy outcomes by promoting health-related behaviours; (2) to improve child health, development and safety by promoting competent care-giving; and (3) to enhance parent life-course development by promoting pregnancy planning, educational achievement, and employment. The program also has two secondary goals: to enhance families' material support by providing links with needed health and social services, and to promote supportive relationships among family and friends.<sup>53</sup> This program has similarities with the nurse visitation projects within the HOF areas and early indicators suggest that the program is impacting successfully on wellbeing of families and their children within the catchment areas. In North Queensland there are several models of such support within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and these are showing signs of increasing the wellbeing of new born babies and their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers.<sup>54,55</sup>

## Community and family based services for early intervention including drug and alcohol and domestic violence.

- **Community approaches to support programs** – One example is a suite of programs run by Family Life that recognises the pressures and stresses on families and endeavours to strengthen families who are struggling and keep them in the community. The agency believes that self-esteem and social connectedness reduce social and economic isolation. Through the Creating Capable Communities program, the agency aims to create a whole-of-community culture that strengthens and empowers the community and its members.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See <http://www.promisingpractices.net/program.asp?programid=16>

<sup>54</sup> See [www.ranzcog.edu.au/.../doc.../741-21-apunipima-baby-baskets.html](http://www.ranzcog.edu.au/.../doc.../741-21-apunipima-baby-baskets.html)

And <http://www.anfpp.com.au/about> (Both accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

<sup>55</sup> See Resource Sheet 15 which outlines how early learning and quality care improve child development in Indigenous families at [http://www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap/documents/resource\\_sheets/ctgc-rs15.pdf](http://www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap/documents/resource_sheets/ctgc-rs15.pdf) (Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> September 2012)

<sup>56</sup> See [http://www.familylife.com.au/community\\_services/help\\_for\\_families/creating\\_capable\\_communities](http://www.familylife.com.au/community_services/help_for_families/creating_capable_communities) (Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> September 2012)

- **Strong Communities for Children** which designed a community development project to ensure that every child was connected to an adult who cared about them. This increased connectivity for all families within the community and linked families with others who could offer informal support.<sup>57</sup> This program reduced the reporting rate and increased child well being within the targeted communities.
- **Communities that Care** approach which builds community capacity and leadership in health promotion and risky behaviour prevention.<sup>58</sup>
- **Communities for Children (C4C)** in Australia have been designed to develop better place- based planning and integration of services for children and families. The evaluations show that the services have improved access and planning within local areas and some improvements in child well being have been noted. The evaluation was relatively early in the roll out of the programs across the forty seven sites.<sup>59</sup>
- **Family by Family** support services which match volunteer ‘successful’ families to families in need of support and offer peer support and mentoring to ‘normalise’ the struggles which parents encounter when raising children.<sup>60</sup>
- **Helping Out Families project and the Referral for Active Intervention<sup>61</sup> Services** – both currently operating in Queensland as services which offer intensive and targeted family intervention services. Early indicators suggest that this approach is affecting the number of children who enter the OOHC system. The key to the success appears to be the flexibility of the services that can be offered and the intensity of the interventions.

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<sup>57</sup> See [http://www.clemson.edu/public/ifnl/projects\\_grants/strong\\_communities/](http://www.clemson.edu/public/ifnl/projects_grants/strong_communities/) ( Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> August 2012.)

<sup>58</sup> See [http://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ctc/Communities\\_That\\_Care\\_Community\\_Effectiveness\\_Evidence.pdf](http://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ctc/Communities_That_Care_Community_Effectiveness_Evidence.pdf) (Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> September 2012)

<sup>59</sup> See <http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/fm2010/fm84/fm84d.html> ( Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

<sup>60</sup> See [http://www.familybyfamily.org.au/files/FbyF\\_article.pdf](http://www.familybyfamily.org.au/files/FbyF_article.pdf) ( Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> August 2012).

<sup>61</sup> See CCYPCG Snapshot 2012 Page 109