

# Community Living Association Inc

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The Honourable Tim Carmody SC  
Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry  
PO Box 12196  
George St QLD 4003

Dear Commissioner Carmody

I write on behalf of Community Living Association Inc Management Committee to congratulate you on accepting your role with the Child Protection Commission of Inquiry into Queensland Child Safety system.

Community Living Service operates two services that work with people with intellectual disabilities and other cognitive disabilities. In this work we come into contact with two issues in relation to Child Safety. These two issues are

- parents with an intellectual disability;
- and young people with an intellectual disability or other cognitive disability exiting Child Safety at eighteen.

These two issues, while discreet, are also linked.

## Parents with an Intellectual Disability

Traditionally parents with an intellectual disability have only been a small proportion of parents in the general population - approximately 1% (Lamont and Bromfield 2009 in BOLD Position Statement 2011). However, the number of parents with an intellectual disability is growing. Reasons for this growth are:

- Increased numbers of people with an intellectual disability living in the community as a result of deinstitutionalization policies;
- The reduction of involuntary sterilization;
- The repeal of anti-discrimination laws (Lamont and Bromfield 2009 in BOLD Position Statement 2011).

Our experience is that the removal of children of parents with an intellectual disability into Child Safety care is extremely high. This experience is confirmed by international and national research (see BOLD Network position statement). In 2011 our organisation and others collaborated on developing the enclosed position paper on 'Parents with an Intellectual Disability' (BOLD Network).

## Young People with an Intellectual or Cognitive Disability Exiting Child Safety

The second point at which our organisation comes into contact with young people with an intellectual disability is where they have exited Child Safety at eighteen after having been in the care of the Department.

There is an overrepresentation of young people with intellectual or other cognitive disabilities in Out of Home Care and subsequently significant numbers exiting Child Safety at eighteen. As for other young people who exit Child Safety there are poor outcomes for many young people with intellectual disabilities exiting care. In 2006 CLA Inc carried out the *Journeys of*

*Exclusion* research project, which documented a number of social disadvantages of young people with intellectual disabilities exiting Child Safety. These disadvantages included:

- Homelessness
- Substance Abuse – Drug and Alcohol
- Poor physical and mental health
- Poor educational outcomes
- Poor employment outcomes
- Poor social supports and risk of becoming engaged in exploitative relationships
- Becoming victims of exploitation and crime
- Contact with the criminal justice system
- Communication difficulties
- And early parenthood.

(Jackson, R, O'Connor M. and Chenoweth, L. (2006) *Journeys of Exclusion*, Community living Association Inc., Brisbane <http://communityliving.org.au/publications/Journey%20of%20Exclusion.pdf>)

### **Linking of the Issues of Parents with an Intellectual Disability and Young People with an Intellectual Disability exiting Child Safety**

The linkage between these two issues is that from our experience a number of young women with an intellectual disability who exit Child Safety become mothers fairly shortly after exit and that almost invariably their children come to the attention of Child Safety. The following service systems each play a role in relation to these issues:

#### **- Disability Services Queensland and Parents with an Intellectual Disability**

Many parents with an intellectual disability register an IQ (Intelligence Quotient) within the 55 to 70 range. This range of IQ is associated with functional limitations in decision making, communication, mobility, adaptability, planning, problem-solving, processing of emotions and feelings, understanding abstract concepts, and processing of complex tasks. It also means that while these people meet the Disability Service eligibility requirements, they are not likely to be prioritised for Disability and Community Care Services support against other people with a disability who have more immediate self-care needs.

However, raising children is one of the most difficult and complex tasks that humans have to perform and it is somewhat puzzling that our society does not take this into consideration when considering the supports that a parent with an intellectual disability requires.

#### **- Family Support Services and Parents with an Intellectual Disability**

Most parents with an intellectual disability therefore do not receive support from Disability and Community Care Services. If they are lucky they will receive support from family or other informal supports or from mainstream Family Support Services. Mainstream Family Support Services report that they find it difficult to support this group; their interventions are usually too short, not flexible, not in the person's home where they can practice their skills and not intensive enough.

National and International research indicates that close family support or other forms of shared parenting models are often the most effective in supporting parents with an intellectual disability to successfully raise children.

- **Young People with an Intellectual Disability exiting Child Safety**

As previously mentioned young people with an intellectual disability exiting Child Safety struggle with many social disadvantages. Young women in this group are likely to become mothers shortly after leaving child Safety and likely to have their children come to the notice of Child Safety. Post transition from care support is very necessary for this group. However, once again many of this group will be in the IQ range 55 to 70 and although being eligible for Disability Support will not be deemed a priority.

**Potential Responses**

Our organisation suggests that the Queensland Government Child Safety review needs to consider the following proposals in response to these issues.

- **Disability Services and Community Care Services**

1. That the Disability and Community Care Services alter its prioritising policy to give greater access to Disability support services for parents with an intellectual disability.
2. That the Disability and Community Care Services alter its prioritising policy to give greater access to DSQ services for young people with an intellectual disability exiting Child Safety.

- **Department of Communities**

1. That the Department of Communities alter funding guidelines to non-government organisations so that Family Support Services can provide longer term, more intensive support to parents with an intellectual disability.
2. That the Department of Communities consider the establishment of a small number of Family Support Services specialised in working with parents with an intellectual disability.
3. That the Department of Communities explore through research and practice how 'shared parenting' models might be further developed with parents with an intellectual disability.

- **Child Safety Services**

1. That Child Safety Services develop early assessment programs to guarantee that any child brought into out of home care that is showing signs of 'developmental delay' receive thorough assessment and follow up from specialist services if required.
2. That young people (particularly young women) exiting Child Safety Services are able to receive support from a Transition from Child Safety service for a period of at least two years. Such service to be either provided through access to a Disability funded service or a mainstream service.

Our organisation is keen to further contribute to the review and to engage in discussion with the Department.

Kind regards,



Morrie O'Connor  
Co-ordinator  
On behalf of the Community Living Association Management Committee

## Position Statement on the Situation of Parents with an Intellectual Disability

We call for concerted action to redress the poor parenting outcomes experienced by parents with an intellectual disability. We make this call to the Queensland Government.

The most recent Australian Bureau of Statistics data (2006) identifies there to be 5.2 million families in Australia. Of these, 3.1 million (59.6%) have children, including:

- 2.3 million (47.0%) couple families with children;
- 823,300 (7.9%) one parent families;
- Queensland has 417,000 couple families and 108,000 one parent families with children.

Whilst there is currently no specific measure of the number of Australian families headed by a parent with an intellectual disability, the best available measurement estimates that 1-2 per cent of Australian families with children aged 0-17 include a parent with an intellectual disability (Lamont and Bromfield 2009). Based on this measurement, we can estimate that there may be between a minimum 30,000 and maximum 70-80,000 children with a parent with an intellectual disability in Australia today and between 5,240 to 12,000 children with a parent with an I.D in Queensland.

Whilst the exact number of families and children remains unclear, it is accepted that the number of families headed by a least one parent with an intellectual disability is growing, and is expected to continue to grow. The reasons for this growth include:

- Increased numbers of people with an intellectual disability living in the community as a result of deinstitutionalization policies;
- The reduction of involuntary sterilization;
- The repeal of anti-discrimination laws. (Lamont and Bromfield 2009)

Poor parenting outcomes for parents with intellectual disabilities include:

- Extremely high rates of removal of children of parents with an intellectual disability into statutory child protection care (Booth, Booth et al. 2005; Mayes and Llewellyn 2009).
- Research indicates a high risk amongst young women with an intellectual disability exiting Child Safety of early parenthood and the taking of their children into care (Journeys of Exclusion, 2006).

The factors that contribute to poor parenting outcomes amongst parents with an intellectual disability may include:

- Experiences of poverty and social disadvantage, including homelessness, long-term unemployment, mental illness, entry into the criminal justice system (as victims and offenders);
- Vulnerability to exploitation and abuse, including physical, sexual, financial, emotional;
- Lack of supportive relationships;

- Social isolation and exclusion;
- Limited and/or inappropriate reproductive rights; ante-natal; and parenting supports for people with an intellectual disability.

The Queensland Government needs to take action to provide support to people with an intellectual disability who may, or do, become parents, and to their children. All service development in relation to reproductive rights and all service development in relation to families and children should include specific consideration of how it will meet the needs of people with an intellectual disability who may, or do, become parents.

A survey of forty-five workers from mainly mainstream services that provide family and parenting support in South East Queensland noted that: (BOLD April 2011)

- Mainstream family support services require the ability to provide longer support interventions to parents with an I.D (that is beyond short term 3 or 6 month periods that many services are limited to by funding agreements).
- Mainstream family support services require the ability to provide more intensive contact to parents with I.D (eg. That each contact may be longer because of communication issues, that contacts need to be more frequent and that case loads will need to be smaller).
- Mainstream family support services require the ability to be holistic in their support to parents with an I.D. Holistic support to not only include parenting support but an enhanced ability to support families around accommodation, child care, the recruitment of mentors, family relationship work etc.

Results of the BOLD survey also noted the need for –

- A small network of specialist services in Queensland to work with parents with an I.D
- The development of a training and resource centre for workers working with parents with I.D which is connected to one or more of the proposed specialist services.

## References

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3. Mayes, R. and G. Llewellyn (2009). "What happens to parents with intellectual disability following removal of their child in child protection proceedings?" Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability **34**(1): 92-95.
4. Jackson, R., O'Connor, M., Chenoweth, L., (2006), Journeys of Exclusion, Community Living Association.