

**QUEENSLAND CHILD PROTECTION
COMMISSION OF INQUIRY**

STATEMENT OF PAULINE CARLTON

I, **PAULINE CARLTON**, of c/- level 1, 5B Sheridan Street, Cairns in the State of Queensland, Director, Placement Services Unit (PSU), Far North Queensland Region, Child Safety Services, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, solemnly and sincerely affirm and declare:

1. I am the Director, Placement Services Unit (PSU), Far North Queensland Region, Child Safety Services in the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (the department).
2. I have been appointed to this position since May 2009.
3. When planning and reviewing my work and seeking approval for decisions, when required, I report to Arna Brosnan, Regional Director, Far North Region who is based in the Regional Office, level 1, 5B Sheridan Street, Cairns. My position is part of the Far North Queensland Region.
4. Prior to this appointment I was the Manager of the Community Support Team, Far Northern Zone, Department of Child Safety. I have worked in human services in the public service for over 30 years.
5. I hold a Bachelor of Social Work and a Bachelor of Legal Studies.

ROLE

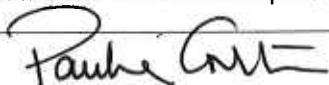
6. The purpose of my role as the Director PSU, is to manage the functions of the unit and to play a leadership role in building placement capacity in the region.
7. The functions of the PSU include:
 - co-ordinating and negotiating out of home care placements in the region
 - recruiting, assessing, supporting and training foster and kinship carers (a joint function with the non-government sector)
 - providing specialist support for complex and extreme placements (including the oversight of the Highly Complex Placements Program)
 - administering the foster and kinship carer approval processes for the region.

ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

Service delivery – how well is child protection functioning?

8. The Far North Queensland PSU has been operational since 2009. Prior to this time each child safety service centre (CSSC) negotiated their own out-of-home care arrangements and supported a small pool of kinship and foster carers.
9. The establishment of a regional unit has streamlined processes and is a more efficient system for managing placements – particularly given the increasing number of children and young people in the system and the greater complexity of the service system.
10. The unit has a staffing establishment of 23.5 permanent positions.

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11. The majority of staff are based in Cairns, however, three kinship and foster care staff are co-located with CSSC staff in the Cooktown, Weipa and Thursday Island hubs.
12. The unit has an additional four kinship and foster care staff employed until June 2013. Funding for these positions was made available following the relinquishment of funding by a non-government organisation.
13. The additional non-recurrent funding has allowed for an additional worker to be based in both Weipa and Thursday Island with the other two temporary staff based in Cairns but servicing Cape York. These workers will remain in place until an alternative non-government option is established.
14. The out-posting of staff in the hubs is an important part of the service model as it reduces the cost of fly in and fly out staff and improves the connection of staff to the communities they work in. Staffing the hubs has been problematic at different times but currently all positions are filled.

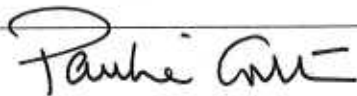
Key regional examples of service delivery and the identification of any other key persons able to speak to the initiatives

15. Therapeutic Placement Service. This service includes a four place residential component and two intensive foster care places. The service has had positive outcomes for a number of young people with complex needs largely the result of having in place a strong practice framework which includes a therapeutic component. I have been advised the Commissioner will be visiting this service on Monday 10 September 2012. Key people to speak to this initiative include: Anna Marino, Operations Manager, Alternate Care.
16. Safe houses (located in Kowanyama, Pormpuraaw, Napranum, Aurukun, Bamaga and Yarrabah). The safe houses provide an important placement option in communities by providing an initial placement option when children are removed. The safe houses are also available for respite or as a safe placement option for children returning to community for family and community connection. The biggest limitation of the safe houses, however, continues to be the lack of exit options for children placed in the services. The lack of foster or kinship carers in communities has meant children remaining in the safe houses on occasion for significantly longer periods than planned. Key people to speak to this initiative include: Kieran Smith, Director, SafeKIDS Program, ACT for Kids (auspice of Napranum, Aurukun, Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama).
17. First Response Service. First Response is an initiative of Uniting Care Community (UCC) in Cairns. The service provides placements for children and young people at entry into care. UCC provides an assessment of the child and family and a recovery plan to identify reunification, placement and therapeutic needs. The service has only been operating since March 2012 but had some early success with a number of children returning home after the initial placement or a placement has been made with kin identified through the assessment process. Key people to speak to this initiative include: Jeanene Lynam, Manager, Out of Home Care, FNQ, Uniting Care Community.

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

18. The PSU works closely with a range of government and non-government agencies across the region.

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19. The Placement Management Team (PMT) sits within the PSU and is responsible for negotiating placements within the region. This team primarily liaises with agencies grant funded by the department to provide placements for children in the care of the department. As of August 2012 the department funds 11 organisations to provide 28 out of home care services in the region. These services include foster and kinship care, intensive foster care, safe houses, residential care and supported independent living services.
20. Where appropriate the PMT also negotiates placements with other services such as youth shelters and disability specific agencies such as respite services.
21. The unit also partners with a range of agencies to recruit, support, assess and train foster and kinship carers across the region. Within Cairns and surrounds these functions are primarily undertaken in partnership with the grant funded agencies. In Cape York and the Torres Strait Islands the partnership includes a broad range of community and government stakeholders.

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

22. Similar to other parts of the state and other jurisdictions the biggest single challenge relating to out of home care is responding to the increasing number of children in the system. The number of children and young people in out-of-home care in the region has grown from 684 in July 2009 to 920 in July 2012.
23. A particular characteristic of the region is the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care. State-wide nearly 40 percent of children in out-of-home care are Indigenous – in Far North Queensland this figure is currently 79 percent.
24. As identified in a number of other submissions to the Inquiry enhanced early intervention and reunification services are required if the number of children in out-of-home care is to reduce. Any additional resourcing of early intervention needs to occur in the context of a strong framework for working with families as this is not always evident in current service responses.
25. In many cases investing in in-home services would be a cost effective alternative to placing a child in out of home care – and have better outcomes for children and families. At times departmental staff express frustration at the lack of resources for in-home family support compared to the costs of keeping a child in out-of-home care with potentially poorer outcomes.
26. Despite a range of recruitment efforts the region continues to struggle to recruit an adequate number of kinship and foster carers to meet the need for family based care. In the absence of this trend being turned around it may be necessary and timely to look at introducing professional carer models.
27. There are particular challenges in recruiting kinship and foster carers in Cape York and the Torres Strait. Despite continued recruitment activities the number of approved carers in these communities is insufficient to meet the need for family based placements.
28. Some of the barriers to recruiting in communities include overcrowding in houses, houses not meeting mandatory requirements, difficulties in securing blue cards, not just for the proposed carers, but also for any adult household member as is required by the legislation,

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and family, clan and cultural complexities. Relaxing the requirement that all household members require a blue card may be a way forward in cases where the carer applicant and majority of household members are blue card eligible and a safety assessment has been conducted by the department.

29. Residential care services are an important part of the service system for those young people for whom family based care is not an option. The majority of residential services in the region, however, are still relatively new and are still developing their service models and practice frameworks. Services struggle with the same recruitment challenges as the department and the lack of mandatory qualifications means that unskilled staff may be working with our most complex children and young people.
30. Across the board continued investment and service development with the non-government sector is required if they are to be the primary providers of out-of-home care services in the State.
31. The geography of the region presents some unique challenges particularly in relation to the cost of delivering services and meeting mandatory timeframes in areas such as the Torres Straits. Locating staff in the hubs has been a positive initiative in responding to these challenges with incentive packages making the roles more attractive to staff.
32. Finally, an evolving strength of the placement system over recent years is increased geographic coverage with placement services now in regional and remote locations. This does at times mean that grant funded placement location does not always match placement demand, however, it has improved the capacity of the department to keep children closer to their family and community.

Declared before me at Cairns this 6th day of September 2012.



Ann C Melloy

Signature of witness to Inquiry

Pauline Ann

Signature of person witnessing statement

Ann C Melloy

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