



Queensland
Foster and
Kinship Care

FOSTER & KINSHIP CARERS SURVEY 2022 REPORT

Contents

Overall State Data.....	1
Demographics	1
Carer Connect.....	2
Statement of Commitment.....	2
Cultural Diversity	2
CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) Community	4
Child Safety Services	4
Child Safety Processes	5
Standard of Care/Harm Report Process	6
Confidentiality	6
Financial	7
Local Practice in CSSC	10
Education Support Plans	11
Child Health Passports	12
NDIS Plans.....	12
Transition to Adulthood.....	13
Placement Agreements	13
Child Participation in everyday life	13
Centrelink.....	14
Support.....	15
Fostering and Kinship Care Programs	15
Foster Carer Agreements	16
Training	16
Complaints/Appeals	17
Queensland Foster and Kinship Care	18
Practice	19
Looking Forward	19
Summary	20

Executive Summary

Region	Completed surveys*	Total carers in Region	% of carers who completed survey**
Sunshine Coast/Central Queensland	115	1061	10.8%
Brisbane/Moreton	156	1317	11.8%
Northern Qld	60	642	9.3%
Far Northern	83	564	14.7%
South East	215	1274	16.9%
South West	141	1113	12.7%

**Source: Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs

In total 770 carers completed a carer survey, as of March 2022 there were a total of 5,971 registered carer families according to the records of the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural affairs website, therefore, a total of 12.9% of carers in Queensland completed a carer survey

Overall State Data

Demographics

- 95% of carers reported being attached to a Fostering and Kinship Care Service.
- 68% of carers identified as Foster Carers, 30% as Kinship and 2% as provisionally approved.
- 91% of carers identified as being over the age of 35 years with 58% identifying being between the ages of 45-64.
- 9.5% of carers (73) who completed the survey identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
- 22 carers or 3% identified as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Background (CALD).
- The majority of carers reported being married (54%) with 10% identifying as being in a de facto relationship, 30% single and 5% identified 'Other'.
- 44% of carers reported having been a carer for four years or less, 21% identified they had been carers for 5-9 years, 15% reported having been a carer for 10-14 years and the remaining 20% identified having spent 15 years plus as a carer.
- 62% of carers reported providing long term care, 23% reported providing short term care, 13% reported providing emergency care and 23% providing respite and short break care (note carers were able to list more than one type of care). 24% identified that they provide all types of care including long term, short term, emergency and respite.

It is positive to note that the vast majority of carers (95%) are receiving support through a foster and kinship care service, this was the same percentage identified in the 2020 survey. Once again the carer surveys continue to evidence that the majority of carers experience positive support through being attached to a Foster and Kinship Care Agency.

There continues to be an upward trend in the number of kinship carers engaging in carer surveys, during 2020 73% identified as foster carers and 25% as Kin, representing a five percent increase in kinship engagement comparatively.

Carer Connect

Carers were asked if they were aware of the Carer Connect app and 720 answered the question with 530 (73.6%) stating they did and 190 (26.4%) stating they did not. Unfortunately this represents a decline since the 2020 report with 20.4% identifying in 2020 they were not aware of the App and 79.6% identifying they were aware.

Those that were aware of the app were asked if they used it, 49.9% of those that were aware of the app stated they used it with 50.1 % stating they do not. This represents a slight increase in usage of those that know about the app since the 2020 report.

With Foster and Kinship Care services licensed to complete at least monthly home visits with carers, there should not be any carer households that at the very least do not know of the app's existence and how to use it. Whether a carer chooses to use the app after being fully informed of its functions is the choice of the carer, however with many carers still not knowing the app exists or how it can benefit them and the children in their care, the app is not being used to its full potential.

Statement of Commitment

The updated version of the Statement of Commitment was released in 2021 and QFKC continues to promote the use of this very important document as a platform for all care team members to draw on understanding regarding roles, rights and responsibilities. In 2022, QFKC partnered with Infinity Solutions and Kummara to produce a webinar on the Statement of Commitment. This production is available via QFKC's website and is a great resource for all stakeholders to view to better understand how the Statement of Commitment plays a role in the day to day lives of all care team members in the Child Protection Sector.

706 carers answered the question relating to knowledge of the Statement of Commitment and QFKC were very impressed to see that 591 (84%) of those carers who answered this question were aware of the Statement of Commitment, representing an 11% increase in knowledge since the last survey. Of those that knew of the document, 66% stated they felt it was a useful document to have in their role as a carer.

Cultural Diversity

As with previous surveys conducted by QFKC, there is a vast gap between the amount of carers who have identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and the number of carers who have identified looking after an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander child throughout their carer journey. This of course continues to evidence the over representation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children in care who are being cared for by non-indigenous carers. In this survey 73 carers identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and 464 carers advised they had cared for an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander child.

If Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children cannot be placed with kin or community in line with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander placement principle, the sector has a responsibility to ensure their cultural needs are being appropriately met through their placement. Along with legislation that compels Child Safety to ensure that children who identify as Aboriginal are placed with carers with 'demonstrated capacity' where they are unable to be placed with kin or community, the 2020 updated version of the Statement of Commitment highlights the shared responsibility of all care team members to meet a child's cultural needs. The Statement of Commitment highlights the right for carers to have access to '*specific assistance to non-indigenous carers caring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander children and young people to help keep the child or young person connected to family, community and culture*', the need for Foster and Kinship Care agencies to *advocate for the importance of Aboriginal*

and Torres Strait islander children to be connected to kin and community’ and for carers to ‘ensure Aboriginal and Torres Straits islander children and young people are connected to family, community and culture’

Carers were asked in this survey to report on their knowledge of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principal and their knowledge of the additional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Core Principles outlined in section 5C of the Child Protection. 453 carers answered the question relating to knowledge of Placement Principle with 352 (77.7%) identifying they understood this Principle. 425 carers answered the additional question relating to the Core Principles with 286 carers identifying they understood these (67%) and 139 (33%) identifying they either did not understand them or were unsure about them. These results are concerning given legislative requirements for all carers require a commitment to meet the Principles of the Child Protection Act, if carers are not sure what these are or do not understand them, their ability to be committed to them and provide care in line with them could be compromised. There is a need for these Principles to not only be trained in the ‘Getting ready to start’ Carer training, but for additional follow up training to be provided through Foster and Kinship Care agencies to ensure understanding and application of all these Principles.

QFKC have continued to highlight the above legislation and responsibilities of the sector in our previous surveys. In 2020 57% of carers reported not having a Cultural support plan, in 2022 this has slightly decreased to 55%. In 2020, 61% reported not being provided with cultural awareness training, in 2022 55% identified they were not provided with cultural awareness training.

Meeting the cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is a legislated Statement of Standard under the Child Protection Act, it is a right for Children under both the Charter of Rights and the Human Rights Act 2019 – it requires a commitment from the entire care team. Carers require a cultural plan they understand and are committed to meeting. They also require appropriate training to assist them to navigate the complexities of caring for a child from a different culture to their own. Carers require assistance to connect children and young people in their care to community in a meaningful way. The legislation, policy, procedure and supporting documents for meeting an Aboriginal or Torres Strait islander child’s needs remains very clear, there is a need for practice to reflect these expectations.

Carers were asked where they accessed the majority of cultural information and the majority of carers reported from family and friends (47% - consistent with 2018 and 2020 surveys). Other sources of access to community information included, Community elders (27%) Foster and Kinship Care Agency (30%), Cultural Practice Advisor Child Safety (17%), Independent Entity (18%) CSO and/or CSSO (38%), Cultural Centre (23%) and other carers (20%). Carers were able to choose more than one option in this section as demonstrated in percentages.

Carers provided 426 comments relating to ways in which they meet the cultural needs of children placed in their care. All comments have been provided to Child Safety for their information; comments are not included in the public reports however overall these comments included:

- Connection to family, extended family and community
- Engaging with local elders and cultural centres
- Attendance at cultural community events
- Accessing NITV and Radio stations
- Attendance at Indigenous schools and playgroups

It was positive to note in this year’s survey that the vast majority of comments provided by carers included many considered examples of how carers were meeting day to day needs of Aboriginal children they provide care for. One carer wrote *‘we incorporate connection to culture into everyday*

life so it feels normal and not a separate part of them'. This statement encompasses the intent of all the policy, procedure and legislation that guides practice when Aboriginal children are not placed with family or community. There were many more examples provided by carers where it is evident they understand the incredibly important role they play in a child's connection to their culture.

Whilst there remained some comments in this survey where carers identified that due to young ages of children or short placement periods, this question was not applicable or they were not able to do anything, these comments were less than in previous years. It is critical that carers hear very clear messages from care team members that connection to culture is not something that should ever be considered not applicable due to age, length of placement or any other reason.

CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) Community

QFKC once again sought information regarding our CALD community, only 22 carers who completed the survey identified from the CALD community. 73 carers identified they had provided care to a child from the CALD community. When asked if they had been provided with cultural awareness training and information, 62% stated they had not. It is pleasing to see that in comparison to last year, 10% more carers were offered cultural education to support their care of children placed with them from the CALD community.

Child Safety Services

Carers were asked a range of questions relating to their experiences with Child Safety which are specifically outlined in the individual regional reports. Carers were provided options of answering 'always, mostly, sometimes, never or n/a'. QFKC kept the same options provided in the 2020 report following feedback from carers that in some instances they had good experiences with their Child Safety Service Centre staff and others they did not. For this reason, it was felt that providing options that reflected a carers experience across their years would be a more reflective and accurate record of carers' views.

With this in mind, the following responses were provided in respect to the following question.

Are you satisfied that staff at your local office are;

Respectful	57% reported feeling always or mostly respected (59% 2020)
Included as part of a team	40% reported feeling always or mostly part of the Team (40% 2020)
Considering your views	40% reported feeling that their views are always or mostly considered (40% 2020)
Consider your family as a whole	39% reported feeling that their family as a whole is always or mostly considered (38% 2020)
Are responsive to your calls and emails	46% reported staff are responsive to calls and emails (45% 2020)
Provide a supportive environment	39 % reported feeling mostly or always supported by their local CSSC (44% 2020)

As demonstrated in above data, there has been little change in responses since the 2020 survey.

46% (43% 2020) of carers identified overall they feel mostly or always satisfied with Child Safety in respect to feeling supported to advocate on behalf of children and young people in their care for resources, goods and services. Carers are assessed against their ability to undertake this very task in their initial approvals and subsequent renewal of approvals. The role of carers advocating on behalf of children is incredibly important to any child or young person in care, they are often the one consistent voice who carries the most knowledge about the child’s needs. All carers should feel supported to advocate on behalf of children and young people, if there is any concerns relating to advocacy from carers not being seen as child centred, Child Safety must be proactive in having open discussions with carers about their worries and ensure the child or young person has access to a child advocate independent from Child Safety (i.e. independent person where appropriate and/or Community visitor or Child Advocate through the Office of the Public Guardian) where the views of Child Safety and the carer household may differ). It is important to recognise that care team members having different views should not be seen as a concern or worry, rather an opportunity for curious discussion and exploration.

38% (37% 2020) of carers identified that they were mostly or always satisfied in respect to their CSO letting them know when they are going to be away on leave or unavailable. Southern Downs undertakes a carer newsletter every month with a section identifying all planned leave for Child Safety Staff and who to contact in their absence. It is interesting when filtering information to those who completed this survey who are attached to the Southern Downs CSSC, 56 % identified being either mostly or always satisfied. This demonstrates that the use of this tool does have an impact on carer satisfaction and whilst this should not negate Child Safety Staff using other methods such as phone and email to also let their carer households know when they are going to be away, it provides another effective tool.

Child Safety Processes

Carers were asked a range of questions relating to Child Safety processes and their satisfaction. Once again carers were provided options of ‘always, mostly, sometimes and never’.

Approval and Renewal of Approval	54% always or mostly satisfied (55% 2020)
Placement Agreement completion	41% always or mostly (42% 2020)
Home visits being completed by CSO	48% always or mostly (48% 2020)
Ability to engage in Case Plan for children in care	44% always or mostly satisfied (44% 2020)

There has been no real change since the 2020 report according to these figures. As highlighted in the 2020 Carer Survey, carer’s rights to be included in both these processes are reinforced through legislation i.e. Child Protection Act 1999, 51W (1) (d) – speaks to participation in Case Planning and specifically provides an example of an approved carer and Section (84) which speaks to the requirement for the Chief Executive to enter into a written agreement for the child’s care. Participation of carers in these crucial processes are also reinforced through Child Safety’s Policy and Procedure and the Statement of Commitment. All these platforms recognise the role carers play in children and young people’s lives and therefore the criticality of consultation through these processes.

Child Safety must place priority through practice in the completion of Placement agreements for each and every household. Retention of carers is linked to carers feeling supported and their household needs being understood and met. If foster carers in particular are not having placement needs met,

they will be more likely to end placements, there is more chance of placement breakdowns and there is also more chance of Standard of Care or Harm report matters being raised in any carer household. For kin, the consequences can be devastating with children further displaced from family due to placement breakdowns. Placement agreements are the very document that is reviewed when a Standard of Care Review identifies that Standards have not been met for a child or young person. If the very document used to review how a care team can better meet the Standards of care for a child or young person is either not completed or not completed in a collaborative manner with all care team members contributing, then this will increase the chances of standards not being met for a child or young person in a family based placement.

Standard of Care/Harm Report Process

Carers were asked a range of questions relating to their experiences of Standard of Care Reviews and Harm Reports. For the purposes of this section, those carers who felt the question was relevant to them have been analysed, 211 carers identified they had experienced either a Continue to Monitor, Standard of Care Review or a Harm Report.

Carers were asked if they were satisfied or not satisfied – the following responses were provided;

	Satisfied	Not Satisfied	%
Experience of overall process	44	117	27 % Satisfied (question not asked in 2020) 73% Not Satisfied
Review process if not satisfied with outcome	38	78	23% Satisfied (26% 2020) 47% Not Satisfied (74% 2020)
Communication during process	53	108	32% satisfied (31% 2020) 65% Not Satisfied (69% 2020)
Sensitivity during process	48	115	29% Satisfied (29% 2020) 70% Not satisfied (71% 2020)
Information provision during process	43	115	27% Satisfied (23% 2020) 71% Not Satisfied (77% 2020)
Timeliness of process	46	115	28 % Satisfied (25% 2020) 70 % Not Satisfied (75% 2020)

There has been little change in satisfaction rates for carers who have experienced a Standard of Care process. In the last Executive summary, QKFC spoke to working closely with Child Safety in relation to identifying significant changes to policy and procedure relating to the way in which Child Safety responds to Standard of Care matters. It is disappointing two years on, whilst work has continued to take place in the background, there has been no changes on the ground. The SOC project has seen significant delays resulting from COVID and other Child Safety priorities taking precedence. QKFC hopes to see progress in this space with carer retention also reliant on processes that reflect best practice when working with carers to address potential Standard of care issues within the placement.

Confidentiality

It is important that carers have all the relevant information in order to provide safe and appropriate care to not only children and young people in care, but other children and household members too. QKFC became aware of the Information Sharing Guidelines since the last Survey was completed when we were asked to provide feedback as to how the document was being received in the Community.

QFKC were not aware of the document and whilst we acknowledge it was accessible on Child Safety's website, without knowing of its existence we had never sought it out. QFKC has now updated our Information Sharing training module to reflect the Guidelines. As the Peak Body for Foster and Kinship Carers, if this is a document we have missed, it should be a fair assumption to reach that the carer community have been largely unaware of its existence.

Carers were asked a range of questions relating to confidentiality and the sharing of information;

- 56% of carers felt that they were never or only sometimes provided with information relating to the child or young person at the time of placement – there was a slight improvement from the 2020 survey with a reduction of 2% in this area.
- 59% of carers felt that they were only sometimes or never provided with information about a child or young person as it became available to Child Safety. This figure represented a 3% decrease from the 2020 survey of carers feeling this way.
- 51% of carers reported only sometimes or never feeling satisfied in relation to safety checks being completed prior to their identifying information being given out. This figure represented a 3% decrease of carers feeling this way since the 2020 survey. 14% of carers did not feel this question was relevant to them; these carers are likely to be made up mostly of kinship carers where family members already have the information.
- 70% of carers felt that they did have a good understanding of the confidentiality provisions of the act and how this related to them as carers. This figure represented a 1% increase in carers feeling this way.

There is significant room for improvement in the area of information sharing with carer households. QFKC has seen reports authored by Child Safety staff in senior management positions whereby statements have been made that Child Safety is not required to share case plans with carers, despite legislation clearly supporting carers having access to case plan material that supports them to provide care that aligns with the case plan. A culture shift needs to take place in Child Safety where carers are genuinely seen as part of a care team all of the time as this culture shift will result in sharing of appropriate information and will have the roll on effect of carers being informed so that the following outcomes can be achieved:

- Better placement matching resulting in less placement breakdowns.
- Carers understanding a child's trauma history and providing care that aligns with these experiences.
- Empathy and compassion that is more likely to develop for birth families when carer households understand relevant and contributing factors as to why children have entered into care.
- Carers being prepared with the time availability to meet the contact and therapeutic needs of the children in their care.
- Retention of carers, as all of the above leads to carer households feeling valued, part of a team and in a position whereby they are providing care for children and young people that best matches their carer household capacity.

Financial

Carers were asked a range of questions relating to their satisfaction around financial matters. QFKC expanded on questions this year given the cost of living crisis that every day families are experiencing.

The dissatisfaction rate for the fostering allowance continues to remain low compared to when QFKC first started undertaking the carer surveys.

- 2014 84% satisfaction

- 2016 65% satisfaction
- 2018 59% satisfaction
- 2020 53% satisfaction
- 2022 53% satisfaction

Carers were asked during this carer survey whether they believed that the CPI annual increase to the carer allowance has kept up with the actual cost of providing care for children and young people. Only 12% of carers responded yes to this question with 66% responding no and the remaining 22% responding they were unsure.

Carers were then asked what areas they believed to place the financial burden on their carer households. Carers were able to tick more than one

Living Cost	Numbers
Everyday essential living expenses (clothing, food shelter)	406
Health and Wellbeing	254
Extra-curricular	254
Transport	232
Education	168
Other	254

In terms of the 'other comments' 92, out of the 254 went on to expand. Themes included:

- Entertainment
- Holidays
- Income loss
- Property damage

Carers were also asked about their satisfaction in respect to CSNA and HSNA requests being met, of those who felt that the question was relevant to them (405 carers) 52% reported not feeling satisfied with this area (61% not satisfied in 2020 survey) indicating an increase in the amount of satisfied carers in this area which is positive. QFKC is aware that there is work being undertaken in reviewing the HSNA and CSNA policies, we welcome these reviews and hope that carers will experience fair and equitable access to higher allowances where applicable as a result of this review.

In respect to Child Related Costs (CRC's), carers were asked whether they were satisfied in relation to a range of CRC's, only those who felt the question was relevant to them have been included in the following and these results have then been compared with the 2020 Carer Survey to provide some additional context and meaning;

CRC	Percentage 2020	Percentage 2022
Medical/Health/Therapy	Not satisfied – 60%	Not satisfied – 62%
Kilometric Allowance (over 250km allowance)	Not satisfied – 61%	Not satisfied –56%
Educational Costs	Not satisfied – 59%	Not satisfied – 66%
Client Support	Not satisfied – 63%	Not satisfied – 66%

There has been a slight increase in satisfaction regarding the application of kilometric allowance, in all other areas identified the satisfaction rates have declined slightly. As the rise in cost in living increases, it is imperative that carers are supported to access financial reimbursements for CRC's that sit outside

of the fostering allowance. Alongside many other factors, carers access to fair and timely reimbursements related to CRC's will support carer retention.

Carers were asked in the 2020 survey about their provision of Dual Respite which has not been asked in previous years. 43% of carers identified not being satisfied in this area. In the 2022 survey 40% of carers identified not being satisfied in this area. QFKC wrote the following in the previous 2020 carer survey Executive Summary and would state based on this carer result and our direct service delivery, this position remains.

QFKC continue to seek policy and procedural change that will support consistency in decision making in the area of approval for Dual Respite. This is not an area that has been resolved despite carers raising it through the Partners in Care and QFKC Carer Forums. At the present time a carer, with the exact same circumstances, could be provided with very different outcomes in relation to their ability to access Dual Respite dependant on the CSSC they are attached to

On 2nd July 2018, the Australian Federal Government through the Department of Education and Training extended the Australian Child Care Subsidy at risk category to include all children in care across Australia. When the scheme was initially introduced, there was widespread challenges across the State in the application of the subsidy. Since the last carer survey was completed, Child Safety have completed a guide for carers which clearly outlines roles and responsibilities of all key stakeholders when applying for the subsidy inclusive of the carer, Child Safety, the Day care service and Centrelink. This is a very helpful document, which QFKC was able to have input into. In 2020 the question relating to whether carers were satisfied with the provision of required documents to access the free child care through the ACCWS for children in care was asked and 592 carers reported this question as relevant to them with 65% reported feeling satisfied in this area. In 2022, the same question was asked with 414 carers reporting the question as relevant and 68% feeling satisfied that the required documents were provided. It is positive to see a continued increasing trend in satisfaction in this area.

Carers were asked if they were encouraged to apply for ex-gratia payments; 90 carers reported that they were satisfied in this area, 414 carers felt this question was relevant to them meaning that 78% of carers across the state reported not feeling satisfied in this area (81% not satisfied in 2020).

Finally, carers were asked about their satisfaction in relation to overall information provision regarding Child Related Costs – of those carers who felt the question was relevant to them (490), 69% reported feeling dissatisfied in this area (65% 2020).

QFKC has continued through many bi-annual survey reports to highlight the decreasing satisfaction and resulting impact on carer households as it relates to financial reimbursement. Carers are volunteers and the Child Protection System is reliant on volunteers opening up their homes to provide care for children. When society is experiencing a cost of living crisis and where the cost of caring for children and young people in family based care has not been closely examined in 16 years, this very factor will and is already likely to be a reason why carers are exiting the system and/or not becoming carers in the first instance.

During the Partners in Care and again during the QFKC Carer Forums, carers raised concern that the allowance needed to be reviewed; to date this still has not occurred. Carers overwhelmingly have responded in this survey to their views that the rise in the fostering allowance has not kept up with the actual true cost of living and have identified that the pressures they are feeling come from meeting the very basic costs of living associated with shelter, food, clothing etc.

There is no debating that since QFKC completed the last survey, there has been a significant rise in the cost of living for Australians across a wide range of essential household living, inclusive of rent, mortgages, electricity, food, insurances, petrol and the list goes on. Carers received a 3.9% increase

to the foster allowance for 2022, however this will fall very short of the actual inflation and as reflected in previous survey reports, even if CPI matched inflation, this is not an accurate reflection of the actual rise in the cost of living for many families. The Queensland Government recently announced that sector staff would have an additional 2.19% increase to their wages in addition to the 2.88% announced on 1st July in recognition of the rise in cost of living. The fostering allowance was not raised again.

It is QFKC's strong view that an urgent review of the fostering allowance is required so that Child Safety can successfully retain and recruit carers now and into the future to ensure that children and young people that cannot be at home, can experience family based placements. No carer should be out of pocket as a matter of course for a role where they volunteer their home, life and more to ensure children and young people experience a sense of love and belonging.

Local Practice in CSSC

Carers were asked a range of questions relating to their interactions with their CSO and CSSC. QFKC continues to highlight the importance of communication being the key factor to carers feeling like part of a care team. The updated version of the Statement of Commitment launched in 2021, provides many commitments to carers that if undertaken in practice, would most certainly create a culture where communication is occurring as intended. For example, the Statement of Commitment speaks to the rights of carers to be part of discussions that inform decisions in relation to children they care for, it speaks to discussions taking place with carers about concurrent planning and it speaks to providing carers with timely and ongoing information about children or young people they care for. It is therefore very evident that Child Safety's intentions around expected communication are very high; it is unfortunate for carers at times that these expectations are not always met. Any staff member from Child Safety is able to access QFKC's online training available through our website on the Statement of Commitment; this training highlights key areas of knowledge and provides practice based examples of how the Statement of Commitment should be used in every day practice.

In the 2020 survey, QFKC asked carers whether they were satisfied regarding communication when they had a changeover of CSO, only 26% of carers reported feeling always or mostly satisfied in this area. The same question was asked of carers in 2022 and the exact percentage of carers at 26% reported feeling satisfied or mostly satisfied. Carers then report only a 30% satisfaction rate with CSO's knowledge of the history of the child in their care (29% 2020). It must be recognised that Child Safety, like many organisations across all sectors, are facing a work force crisis with simply not enough staff to fill the many required positions. In Human Services, the flow on effect to this can be employed staff being overworked to compensate for the unfilled positions, which can then of course lead to burn out and more staff leaving. This is not an issue relevant to Child Safety only, rather one facing Foster and Kinship Care agencies and Humanity services across the board. It is important these messages are shared with the carer community so they can understand why they may not be receiving responses. For example if a CSSC has many positions unfilled it is important for carers to be told this and a communication strategy developed to ensure shared understanding of matters to escalate and how when matters are urgent.

Case Plans and Placement Agreements are both areas where carers should play a key role in the development and implementation. Carers were asked about their satisfaction with the timeliness and provision of approved Case Plans, 33% of carers reported feeling always or mostly satisfied in this area (30% 2020). It is unclear the extent to which this is an intended action whereby CSO's are of the view they cannot share case plans with carers due to confidentiality or whether they are not being shared for other reasons. Either way, it is critical that Child Safety staff are provided with clear advice from management down regarding expectations.

In the 2020 Carer Survey 74% of carers stating they are only sometimes or never satisfied regarding timeliness to help keep carers updated in respect to matters relating to CSSC and 76% reporting only feeling sometimes or never satisfied with updates relating to regional/department change. There has been some very real improvements in this area with 59% reporting only sometimes or never satisfied in relation to information provided by CSSC and 66% only sometimes or never satisfied with updates in respect to Region/Department as a whole. This represents in both areas an increase in satisfaction of at least 10% which is very pleasing.

As mentioned earlier in this Executive Summary and in previous reports, QFKC has seen an exceptional example of how CSSC and regional updates can be communicated to carers through the monthly newsletters currently being undertaken by the Southern Downs Child and Family Service Centre. When filtering results in this section to identify whether the use of a Newsletter has benefited in this space, not one carer reported that they are 'never' satisfied with communication from the CSSC, with 40% saying they were either always or mostly and 60% stating sometimes.

Carers were asked if they felt supported to access respite. Whilst 29% of carers felt this question was not relevant to them, there were 419 carers who felt that the question was relevant (i.e. have a desire to access respite) and 67% of those carers stated they only felt supported to access respite some of the time or never (64% 2020). This dissatisfaction rate has increased by 16% since 2018. QFKC acknowledges that this lack of support to access respite is likely linked in many cases to respite placement options simply not being available.

Carers were asked about family contact and whether consultation takes place, 60% of carers reported feeling only sometimes or never satisfied in this area (66% 2020). QFKC has seen an increasing trend in the past two years of carers contacting QFKC for matters relating to family contact, with family contact being an issue that QFKC are working with an average of 20 carer families at any given time. Often it is evident that the conflict does not exist in the contact itself, rather the communication that exists around the planning and facilitation of contact. Carers are often contacted and advised what contact will be with no consultation or at times consideration as to how the contact times and plans will impact on other children in the placement and the carer family as a whole.

Once again, the sector must honour the Statement of Commitment, which if applied in practice, carers would be consulted and decisions would be made that were mindful of the whole of carer family. The Statement of Commitment reads

- *support and facilitate the participation of foster and kinship carers in the decisions affecting the life of the child or young person in their care and have the carer's knowledge and opinions inform decision making processes to ensure the best interests of the child*
- *consider the foster and kinship carers household when making decision regarding the child or young person in their care*

Education Support Plans

Please note 588 carers answered this question

Overall 60.9% (59.6% in 2020) of carers reported having an Education Support Plan (ESP) for children and young people in their care.

- 58% felt always or mostly satisfied with their inclusion in the process (71% 2020)
- 55% felt always or mostly satisfied with the timeliness of the plan (65% 2020)
- 61% felt always or mostly satisfied with the finalised plan (66% 2020)
- 52% felt always or mostly satisfied with the review of the plan (64% 2020)
- 51% felt always or mostly satisfied with the implementation of the plan (60% 2020)

There were significant increases in satisfaction rates between the 2018 and 2020 survey's, however unfortunately it appears that satisfaction rates among carers in the area of Education Support Plans has now declined. QFKC is aware that there is currently work underway in the Education department to look at ways whereby the development and implementation of Education Support Plans for children subject to custody and guardianship orders to the Chief Executive are meeting the needs of the child in the context of their education. It is recognised that funding in this area has not kept up with the amount of children and young people who have entered care and therefore schools are needing to be very proactive and creative in the ways they allocate money.

Carers were asked additional questions relating to the area of education in this survey. Firstly carers were asked whether they felt that children in their care received sufficient support to attend school (including early childhood education), 582 carers answered this question with 77% stating yes, and 23% stating no.

Child Health Passports

Please note 582 carers answered this question

Of those who answered 47% identified they have a Child Health Passport for children in their care (43% 2020)

- 46% felt always or mostly satisfied with their inclusion in the process (52% 2020)
- 46% felt always or mostly satisfied with the support provided (44% 2020)
- 41% felt always or mostly satisfied with the process itself (42% 2020)
- 39% felt always or mostly satisfied with information provided (39% 2020)

Carers were asked for this survey whether any child they had care for had been part of the Strengthening Health initiative. 576 carers answered this question and only 23 stated they had been.

Further additional questions were asked of carers in respect to health and wellbeing experiences for children and young people they have provided care to. Carers were asked if they *strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed* in respect to these particular questions as follows:

- Have access to health services when they need them – 60% stated they either agreed or strongly agreed, 21% were neutral and 19% either disagreed or strongly disagreed.
- Have access to mental health services when they need them – 31% stated they agreed or strongly agreed, 28% were neutral and 41% either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

It is very interesting to see the vast difference in experiences in accessing health services as a whole as opposed to mental health services and an important take away from this survey to explore in terms of barriers.

NDIS Plans

This is the first time QFKC has explored NDIS plans in a carer survey so there will be no comparison data.

Please note 576 carers answered this question

38% of carers reported that a child in their care did have an NDIS plan

- 55% felt always or mostly satisfied with their inclusion in the process
- 47% felt always or mostly satisfied with the support provided
- 46% felt always or mostly satisfied with the process itself

- 40% felt always or mostly satisfied with information provided

Transition to Adulthood

This was the first time QFKC has explored transition to adulthood in the Carer survey so there will be no comparison data.

Please note 576 carers answered this question

27% of carers reported they have or are supporting a young person through transition to adulthood

- 54% felt always or mostly satisfied with their inclusion in the process
- 54% felt always or mostly satisfied with the young person's inclusion in the process
- 41% felt always or mostly satisfied with the process itself
- 39% felt always or mostly satisfied with the outcomes provided
- 36% felt always or mostly satisfied with follow up
- 34% felt always or mostly satisfied with the review process

Placement Agreements

Please note 572 carers answered this question

Carers were asked whether they had a current Placement Agreement that had been generated from a placement meeting.

Overall 51% of carers stated that they did have a current Placement Agreement (62% 2020)

- 67% felt always or mostly satisfied with inclusion in process (53% 2020)
- 63% felt always or mostly satisfied with the process (49% 2020)
- 62% felt always or mostly satisfied with the outcomes (49% 2020)
- 53% felt always or mostly satisfied with follow up (40% 2020)
- 53% felt always or mostly satisfied with review process (40% 2020)

63% of carers reported they **did not** receive a copy of the minutes from the placement meeting (79% 2020). There is some interesting statistics in this carer survey, whilst the number of carers who reported having a placement agreement has dropped by 11% since 2020, those that did have a placement agreement reported much higher satisfaction in the process than in previous years which is positive. There has also been an increase in the number of carers who have reported receiving a copy of their placement agreement, which is also positive. This percentage still remains too high, placement agreements are an agreement entered into by carers which is required under the Child Protection Act, all carers should have a copy of the placement agreement at all times.

Child Participation in everyday life

QFKC were asked by the Queensland Family and Child Commission to explore whether children or young people in care have been unable to join in everyday life activities due to departmental restrictions.

Activity	Number
School excursions	37
Sleepovers	59
Drama	9

Dance	13
Sports	66
Holidays	172
Other	360 (most answers were n/a)

Comments provided in other sections that were relevant related to matters such as overseas travel, being able to take children away on short notice when there are family emergencies and some related to high Risk activities such as motorbike riding and shooting.

Overwhelming it appears children are most effected by the inability to go on holiday. This would be supported by reference to decision making in Child Safety’s Practice Manual whereby anything over three days away requires parental and child safety consent if the child is subject to a short-term custody order or consent from Child Safety if the children is subject to a long term order to the CE. Carers experience non approval in this area due to the proposed holiday interfering with family contact.

Centrelink

Carers continue to report low satisfaction rates in this area, demonstrating a lack of understanding and communication amongst all care team members. This can be a very complex area to understand and it is accepted that some Child Safety staff may also struggle to understand the complexities of the system.

- 36% of carers reported feeling that information from the department about Centrelink always or mostly happens
- 56% of carers reported feeling either always or mostly satisfied with the provision of Australian Child Care Subsidy
- 36% of carers reported feeling either always or mostly satisfied with ease of access to Centrelink Services
- 38% of carers reported feeling either always or mostly satisfied with timeframes for the provision of Medicare Cards
- 44% of carers reported they feel either always more mostly satisfied with the time frames for the provision of Health Care cards

It is pleasing to see that the Grandparents line run by Services Australia has recently expanded and changed its name to reflect that this service operates for foster and kinship carers also. QFKC asked carers whether they had heard of the Grandparents and Non-parents phone line, 558 carers answered this question and 54% identified they had used it. Of the 299 carers who had used it 57% said that they found it useful

QFKC has a training module on Carer Finance and will be doing a workshop at the QFKC foster and kinship Conference in Cairns (April 2023) on all matters relating to carer finance. As part of this workshop, there will be a specific section on Centrelink support. QFKC will also run a live webinar in 2023 that will be open to all carers and sector staff across Qld that will cover all topics covered in the workshop. This will then be available for viewing on our website which will provide a great resource to any care team member needing additional factual information on finance matters, including that of Centrelink.

Support

Carers were asked a range of questions relating to where they access their support from.

Source of support	Percentage 2020	Percentage 2022
Foster and Kinship care agency	64%	70%
Family and Friends	60%	75%
Other carers	30 %	32%
Child Safety Services	22%	31%
QFKC staff and support team	19%	20%
Social Media	Not asked	18%

Carers were able to tick more than one source of support; support accessed in each of the areas has increased since 2020 which is positive.

In relation to where carers access their information from, once again fostering agencies were the highest source 70% (70% 2020), with other carers coming in second, 32% (31% 2020) CSSC 31% (23% 2020) and QFKC/FAST 20% (20% 2020). Carers were also given the option in this survey of Social Media and 16% of carers reported getting their information from Social Media.

Fostering and Kinship Care Programs

Carers were asked a range of questions relating to the support provided by their Foster and Kinship Care Agencies. 95% of carers reported being supported by an agency and reported the following in relation to their experiences of support;

- 84% reported feeling always or mostly satisfied with the regular support visits (at least monthly) (80% 2020)
- 84% reported feeling always or mostly satisfied with response provided by their agency to their (the carers) contact (82% 2020)
- 78% reported feeling always or mostly satisfied with support to complete paperwork (77% 2020)
- 70% reported feeling always or mostly satisfied in respect to access to support networks (68% 2020)
- 76% reported feeling always or mostly satisfied in respect to access to training (72% 2020)
- 72% reported feeling always or mostly satisfied with the on call service (10% felt this was not relevant to them leaving 18% feeling only sometimes or never satisfied) (71% 2016)
- 81% of carers were either mostly or always satisfied with their worker's knowledge of current policy, procedure and legislation (79% 2020)

As can be evidenced above, the satisfaction rates amongst carers in relation to their Foster and Kinship Care Agency support has either remained stable or increased in terms of satisfaction which is pleasing to see. These statistics have remained a consistent positive aspect of carer feedback throughout the time QFKC has been undertaking carer surveys and represents therefore the value in foster and kinship care agency support for carer households.

QFKC continues to provide a daily service to Foster and Kinship care staff where we regularly receive phone calls and emails from Foster and Kinship Care agencies from across the State asking for advice on policy, procedure, legislation and practice. QFKC also provides professional development opportunities through both face to face and online training to Foster and Kinship care agencies across the State as well as providing relevant and up to date information relating to the Child Protection sector as it becomes available to us through our email contact list of at least 80 foster and kinship care

services. QFKC values the partnership that exists between the Foster and Kinship Care Services and QFKC in the delivery of quality support to carers across Queensland.

Foster Carer Agreements

Carers were asked if they had a current Foster Carer Agreement (FCA), this question specifically pointed out that kinship carers are not required to have a Foster Carer Agreement. 553 answered this question, 373 said they had one, 48 said they did not, 21 said that they did not know what one was and 111 stated they were kinship carers and did not require one.

Carers were then asked a range of questions as to the value of Foster Carer Agreements;

- 80% of carers felt that the Foster Carer Agreement accurately reflected the needs of their family (70% 2020) (3% felt this question was not relevant meaning only 17% felt that the FCA did not reflect the needs of their family).
- 78% felt that the FCA accurately represents learning and support needs (68% 2020) 15% felt that it did not. 70% felt that it had then gone on to be a useful tool to assist with the actual learning and development (58% 2020), 20% felt it had not and 10% felt the question was not relevant to them.
- 70% felt that the FCA has been a useful tool to establish appropriate placement options (60% 2020), 21% felt it had not and 9% felt the question was not relevant to them.
- 65% of carers felt that the FCA went on to be a useful tool in assisting with learning and develop.

Accurate FCA's that reflect assessments and therefore the carer household capacity will always be the most important document in establishing good placement matching. If Carers are asked to go outside of their FCA, it is imperative that the supports provided to the carer to ensure capacity are provided. These additional supports should not only be provided in the short term, but throughout the duration of the placement and/or until a collaborative review with the care team (inclusive of the carer) determines the carer household capacity has increased to accommodate the placement without the additional support. If the sector continues to place pressure on carer households that sit outside an assessed capacity, care arrangements will continue to break down and children will continue to experience harm through the trauma that continued separation from primary carers brings.

Training

Carers were asked a range of questions relating to their experiences of training. In previous years, this has been an area where carers have shown high satisfaction rates. 59% of carers have told us they always or mostly feel satisfied with the relevance of training (59% 2020) and 66% of carers were always or mostly satisfied with the amount of training offered (62% 2020).

Carers once again expressed less satisfaction with the appropriateness of the time of day/night training was offered with only 44% feeling only sometimes or never satisfied in this space (44% 2020). 41% of carers identified that they were only sometimes or never satisfied with the provision of support to access childcare for the purposes of training (31% 2020). 64% of carers reported feeling either always or mostly satisfied with the information provision regarding content of training.

COVID19 had many negative impacts on our carers and communities; however there were also some positive lessons to come out of these experiences. Of note is the increase in online training and therefore accessibility to carers across Qld. QFKC is so happy to be able to now offer training to carers across Qld through our You Tube channel accessed through our Website. On here, carers now have access to live recorded webinars and training productions that cover a wide range of topics. It is hoped this area will continue to grow and carers will be in a position to access training that is relevant to

them at a time that is suitable to them. This can only then benefit the children and young people they provide care for as carers become more informed.

At the time of writing this report, QFKC are partnering with Child Safety to re-develop what will now be module 6 – mandatory training undertaken in the first year of caring for foster carers. This training has not been updated in nearly 20 years and therefore the updated version and topics covered will ensure that carers are accessing information that is up to date, relevant and most importantly will have the real consequence of assisting them in their role as carers.

The Queensland Child and Family Commission wanted to hear from Carers in relation to their knowledge around trauma informed care. Carers were provided statements and had to answer either Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree or Strongly Disagree to the statements:

- *I am aware of the impact of trauma on brain development* – 89% either agreed or strongly agreed (5% were neutral on this statement)
- *I keep up with the latest evidence about child and adolescent brain development* – 74% agree or strongly agreed (20 % were neutral on this statement)
- *Training in trauma informed care will support my role as a carer* – 85% either agreed or strongly agreed (11% were neutral on this topic)

Complaints/Appeals

Carers were asked a range of questions relating to their knowledge and experience of the various complaint and appeal processes available to them in the Child Protection System.

The following percentage of carers reported knowledge and then access of these complaint/appeal processes.

Complaint/Appeal Process	Knowledge	Accessed
Regional Complaints Office (Child Safety)	52% (42% 2020)	17% (14% 2020)
Central Complaints Office (Child Safety)	32% (22% 2020)	8% (6% 2020)
QCAT	51% (40% 2020)	7% (7% 2020)
Queensland Ombudsman	43% (37% 2020)	6% (3% 2020)
Office of the Public Guardian	64% (58% 2020)	25% (19% 2020)

13% of carers reported never having heard of any of the complaint and appeal processes (22% 2020) and 60% reported not having ever accessed any of them (70% 2020).

Of those carers who had accessed a complaint or appeal process, 61% reported they felt heard during the process (60% 2020), however only 43% reported feeling satisfied with the outcome achieved (43% 2020).

QFKC has spent time with the Central Complaints Unit during the early part of 2022 and have had the benefit of information sessions and training provided to staff and volunteers for QFKC. It is evident through the training that the Central Complaints unit and the whole way in which Child Safety responds to complaints has changed dramatically. QFKC has seen the difference the new policy and procedures are having on practice at the ground level and are having great success in having matters resolved by using the complaint policy and procedure in guiding casework responses. It is hoped the new version of Module 6 will include a very easily understood section on the Child Safety Complaints process which will empower carers to resolve worries at an early stage and prevent matters from reaching levels of complexity that can be avoided.

Queensland Foster and Kinship Care

Carers were asked a range of questions relating to their experiences with QFKC;

- 60% of carers reported satisfaction with information provision about QFKC, 19% felt this question was not relevant to them (60% 2020 with 21% in 2020 feeling question was not relevant to them).
- 60% of carers reported they had knowledge and understanding of the services provided, 16% felt this question was not relevant to them (59% 2020 – 19% felt question was not relevant to them).

Of those carers who felt the questions were relevant to them, the following feedback was provided in relation to QFKC

- 73% reported feeling mostly or always satisfied with access to QFKC staff (71% 2020)
- 70% reported feeling mostly or always satisfied with timeliness of response from QFKC (73% 2020)
- 67% reported feeling mostly or always satisfied with access to QFKC support team members (formally FAST reps)
- 62% reported feeling mostly or always satisfied with outcome achieved (67% 2020)

After the 2020 survey results, QFKC updated our complaints and compliments system to make it more easily accessible to carers through our website so that we could capture any concerns from the carer community. QFKC has not received any complaints through this system. QFKC continues to have an on call roster system with a clear procedure that outlines the requirements from QFKC staff to get back to carers on the day of contact, where this is not able to occur and the carer requires urgent attention, the matter is passed to either another case officer or QFKC Service Support Manager. For matters that are not on call, QFKC staff have rostered days off so may not always be able to respond to the carer in the same day however once again, if the carer requires urgent support, they have the option of either speaking to the Service Support Manager or the Case officer on call.

QFKC's advocacy and support of carers will always align with Child Safety Legislation, Policy and procedure. There are times where the outcomes carers are seeking from QFKC are not able to be achieved due to the desired outcome not aligning with policy, procedure or legislation. For example a carer may contact QFKC because they want QFKC to get a Harm report removed from their file due to not agreeing with it. This is not an outcome we can support but we will always help the carer understand what actions we can take i.e. in this instance we would ensure that the carer had access to a fair and just process through the Harm report and raise any potential practice issues with the CSSC and/or Region.

QFKC undertook an independent review of our FAST program following the 2020 carer survey results. The report findings included 10 recommendations, all of which were accepted by QFKC's Management Committee and have now been implemented. Of most note is the change in name to better reflect the inclusion of Kinship Care and ensure the service is seen as part of QFKC rather than a separate program. The newly named QFKC support team is now also coordinated by the QFKC Team Leader rather than Service Support Manager. This will enable a better focus to assist in implementation of the remaining recommendations. These recommendations include the need to promote the QFKC support team to ensure the carer community is aware of the service and how it can help them, the recruitment of kin carers as volunteers for the program, increased recruitment overall and more professional development opportunities for current Support Team members.

In 2016, QFKC launched a Facebook page that aims to provide accurate advice relating to policy, procedure and legislation to carers across Queensland. This page now has over 3200 members and

continues to be a great source of advice to the carer community. QFKC also continues to run our QFKC main Facebook page which has 7,794 followers at the time of writing this report, when reviewing insights for this main page, from 4th October through to 31st October, posts reached 21.9 thousand followers with 4117 post engagements. QFKC’s social media will continue to grow as the community seeks information and support at times that suit their busy schedule.

Carers were asked how they mostly access QFKC services (only those who felt the question was relevant to them were included).

Mode of Contact	Percentage
Phone	46%
Email	32%
Social Media	13%
QFKC Website	7%
QFKC Reporter	2%

Practice

Carers were asked in 2020 whether they had noticed any positive change in practice since Partners in Care workshops occurred in 2017, 819 carers answered and 21% stated they felt there had been positive change. In this survey, QFKC asked carers **Have you noticed any positive change in practice since 2020** 23% of carers identified they had (531 answered this question). Carers were then asked **Would you consider culture and practice in Child Safety has improved in the last 2 years** 27% of carers responded yes to this question (531 answered this question).

Looking Forward

Carers were asked a range of questions relating to their future as carers. 79% of carers recorded that they intend on fostering for three or more years (82% 2020), 12% said only for another year (12% 2020) and 9% for another 2 years (6% 2020).

When asked whether there was anything that would influence this decision, 47% of carers stated that there would be (42% 2020), and carers were then able to provide comment. 250 carers provided comments on this particular question, the overall theme that came across as to what may be some things that would change this decision included:

- Better decision making for children and young people
- Being genuinely respected as part of a team
- Being heard
- Better training
- Increased financial support
- More practical support to assist in caring for the increasing complex needs of children and young people
- Better sharing of information

The Queensland Family and Child Commission asked carers the following overall questions:

Do you feel that the community has confidence in the child protection and family support system

- 68 % disagreed or strongly disagreed
- 23% remained neutral
- 9% agreed or strongly agreed

Do you believe the child protection and family support system meets the needs of children, young people and families

- 58% disagreed or strongly disagreed
- 25% remained neutral
- 17% agreed or strongly agreed

Carers were then asked if they had suggestions for Child Safety to improve services for foster and kinship carers, 343 carers provided comment and additionally if they had two things that they could change about the system, what would these things be, 408 carers provided comment. All of these comments will be provided to Child Safety for their consideration.

Finally, carers were asked whether they would advise a friend to be a carer, 43% stated yes (43% 2020) and 57% stated no. All sectors understand word of mouth to be the most powerful source of marketing and therefore recruitment.

Summary

QFKC has been undertaking bi-annual surveys now for many years, for carers to continue to take the time to provide feedback, it is imperative that the sector listens and responds. The sector must review these outcomes and recognise the patterns of continued dissatisfaction in some areas and growth in others and provide a response to the carer community as to proposed actions to bring about change.

Recruitment of carers in today's climate is becoming increasingly difficult and so the call for retention is stronger than it has ever been. When we do a good job at retaining carers due to their experiences being positive, recruitment will also improve through word of mouth. There is no miracle solution, it is a combination of many factors, often small, that will make the world of difference to carers;

- A call to provide additional information to carer that will assist them to understand a child's behaviour
- An offer to help a carer fill out paperwork for an ex-gratia payment for the smashed TV they only recently bought
- Inclusion in a placement agreement where the care team come together and worked out how to best meet the placement needs of the carer household
- An offer of meeting babysitting costs for a carer couple to have a dinner out because respite has not been able to be provided for months
- A voucher for a carer family affected by a natural disaster
- An offer of free grief counselling when a carer has had to say goodbye to a child they have loved and cared for three years and an acknowledgment these feelings are expected and ok.

The list could go on and on, ultimately, we must take a step back and consider what the sector can offer carer families to ensure they are best placed to provide family based placements for the over 13 000 children and young people in Queensland, who cannot live at home. What will it take to keep our children and young people out of Residential placements and be with kin or foster carers?

Report presented on behalf of QFKC by:

Hazel Little
President

Bryan Smith
Executive Director

7 November 2022