



Opal's story

Disclaimer: This is the story of a person who shared their personal experience with the Commission of Inquiry through a submission or interview. The names in this story are pseudonyms and identifying details have been removed. The person who shared this experience may not have been a witness and their account is not evidence. They did not take an oath or affirmation before providing the story.

Nothing in this story constitutes a finding of fact by the Commission of Inquiry. Instead, these stories have been published to show how people are experiencing the current child safety system in Queensland. Any views expressed are those of the person who shared their experience, not of the Commission of Inquiry.

Content warning: Some material may be distressing. These statements may include references to violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, suicide, or self-harming behaviours, and may contain strong or confronting language. Some narratives may be about First Nations people who have passed away. Readers are encouraged to engage with this material in a way that supports their wellbeing.

If you would like support, please visit the Commission's [Contact & Support page](#) or reach out to a trusted person or a relevant support service.

We write to share our experience as foster carers for a child, Child A, and to highlight significant concerns regarding decision-making, communication, and processes within the child protection system in Queensland.

We have cared for Child A since her birth. At that time, her father was not recorded on her birth certificate, and the Department advised that his identity and whereabouts were unknown. Over the years, Child A's mother made occasional attempts to identify and contact him, although she was uncertain who it was.

Around Child A's second birthday, the potential father was invited to attend but declined, stating in a message that he did not wish to be involved because Child A was a girl, adding that he would have been interested if she were a boy. We note that the father is of African background, and this perspective may reflect cultural influences.

During this period, we repeatedly requested that the Department attempt to locate or engage the father or his family. We were consistently advised that there was insufficient information to do so. For close to a year, we were being prepared for a long-term permanency outcome for Child A under a Permanent Care Order in our care.

Approximately three weeks before Child A's third birthday, we were unexpectedly informed that her father had made contact with the Department and expressed a desire to meet her and assume her care. This was extremely surprising given the consistent prior advice that he could not be located. However, it was also exciting, as it presented an opportunity for Child A to develop a relationship with her father and strengthen her identity and family connections.

Child A participated in two supervised visits with her father, and the Department spoke positively about his engagement. However, at that time, he was still in the process of securing stable housing with his partner and their infant child. During contact, Child A was encouraged to refer to his partner as "mum" and to him as "dad." Mum was not informed of these developments, which caused her significant distress.

Child Safety Commission of Inquiry



Mum lives with a mild intellectual impairment and ongoing mental health challenges. She is supported regularly by a carer and experiences considerable anxiety around formal processes. She shared concerns with us about the father, including past communications and aspects of his history. At her request, we supported her to attend a police station so she could raise these concerns. The attending officer subsequently made contact with the Department. We are not aware of the details of that communication but understand that concerns were raised.

Following this, the Department advised that we had exceeded our role as carers. We explained that our actions were guided by concern for Child A's wellbeing. We have consistently supported Mum's involvement in her daughter's life, recognising the importance of maintaining that connection. Mum has remained included in family events and is part of Child A's broader support network. We consider this to be a child-centred and trauma-informed approach.

We also raised concerns regarding the father's capacity to provide consistent care. Based on information available to us, including messages indicating previous struggles with mental health and engagement, we were concerned about his ability to meet the ongoing demands of parenting. At the time of transition planning, he and his partner had only recently secured housing.

An eight-week transition plan was proposed. We requested that the Department remain actively involved with the family for a minimum of six months following reunification to ensure appropriate monitoring and support during this significant adjustment period.

On the day of Child A's removal, I followed our usual routine and dropped her at daycare. While attending a personal appointment, I received missed calls from my agency. When I returned the call, I was told an urgent visit was required at my home within the hour, despite Child A being at daycare. I cancelled my appointment and returned home immediately.

During the drive, I asked whether Child A had already been taken to her father. I was told that she had and was instructed not to inform Mum. Upon arriving home, I began packing Child A's belongings in a state of shock and distress. There had been no prior indication that an immediate removal would occur, and no opportunity to prepare or process what was happening.

I later learned that a court decision had been made that day to place Child A in her father's care. We had not been informed that a court hearing was scheduled, nor were we provided with the reasons for this urgent decision.

With no preparation time, I packed Child A's belongings quickly into a bag. This was deeply distressing, as it reflected a lack of dignity and planning for a child who had been in our care since birth. I was again reminded not to inform Mum, with the understanding that the Department would do so.

Child Safety Commission of Inquiry



Mum attempted to contact me multiple times that day. I did not respond, as she had not yet been informed and I had been directed not to disclose any information. Eventually, Mum contacted the daycare and was informed that Child A had been removed and placed with her father. It is deeply concerning that Mum was not formally informed by the Department prior to discovering this information herself. I was not contacted by anyone in the Department that day or after.

We also note that no paternity testing had been conducted prior to placement, and the father was not listed on Child A's birth certificate. He had only met her for the first time three weeks prior.

There was no opportunity for us to say goodbye to Child A or to prepare her in any way. This raises serious concerns about the emotional impact on her—being left at daycare and not returning to the only home she had ever known.

The impact on our family was profound. Our other children, Child B (4 years old, on a Long-Term Guardianship Order) and Child C (14 months), were confused and distressed. Child B, in particular, was devastated and became fearful of attending daycare, believing he might also be taken without warning. My husband lost his job following the removal due to the emotional toll.

While foster carers understand the goal of reunification, this process felt abrupt, poorly managed, and dismissive of legitimate concerns that had been raised.

Following Child A's removal, our home no longer felt like a place of comfort. We experienced ongoing anxiety and received little to no follow-up or support from the Department.

Due to the emotional impact, we made the difficult decision to sell our home and pursue a major life change. I also chose to leave my career in child protection, as my experiences no longer aligned with my professional and personal values.

While overseas, we were informed that Child A's father had relinquished her care and that she would be returned to Child Safety with uncertainty regarding placement. We immediately contacted the Department and offered to return to Australia to resume her care.

In the interim, Child A was placed with my mother, a familiar and trusted caregiver. Upon our return, Child A displayed significant emotional distress, frequently saying, "Never leave me again," and asking why we had left her.

Child B also developed ongoing anxiety, frequently seeking reassurance that Child A would not be taken again. It is deeply concerning that the broader impact on other children in the household was not considered.

Child Safety Commission of Inquiry



We remain in a state of uncertainty regarding Child A's long-term arrangements. Her father has indicated a preference for a Long-Term Guardianship Order, while her mother has expressed a desire for adoption to ensure stability.

We have always been willing to support relationships with biological family members and believe strongly in collaborative, inclusive care that prioritises the child's sense of belonging and security.

Our experience highlights significant systemic issues, including:

- Lack of communication and transparency
- Abrupt and poorly planned transitions
- Failure to consider the emotional impact on children and carers
- Inconsistent decision-making
- Lack of accountability and oversight

In our experience, outcomes can depend heavily on individual relationships with Child Safety staff, which creates inconsistency and stress. While there are many dedicated and compassionate workers, there are also clear gaps in accountability and oversight.

We believe there is a need for an independent body to provide greater oversight, improved communication, and stronger accountability within the system.

This submission has been difficult to write due to the emotional impact of our experience. However, we believe this inquiry is long overdue. Carers are exhausted, families are struggling, and children are being impacted by rushed decisions and systemic pressures.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our experience.