

Dear Commissioners of the Inquiry into Child Safety;

My husband and myself have been foster carers in the [REDACTED] for almost 10 years. During this time, it has been a journey, which has not always been good. We have almost quit multiple times, and if it wasn't for the children in our care, and our worry about displacing them, we would no longer be foster carers. A lot of our time as carers has been full of joy, being able to give love, stability and safety to children who otherwise didn't have those things has been a blessing, and one of the greatest achievements of my life. There are a few moments, in the past ten years, that stick out to me, which I think are valid and should be considered as part of this inquiry, one of which we are still labouring through now. I will detail them here:

About three years into our caring career (and I do class caring as a career, because I've dedicated years to furthering my knowledge and understanding of how to help and care for kids with complex trauma, infants with drug withdrawals, and support families who otherwise have no one in their corner), we had a little one in our care, who was about 18 months old. He came into our care because the previous carers couldn't commit to long term care, and they had been told that there was no way he was going to be reunified with his teen mother. So, imagine my surprise when one day, about 6 weeks later, we dropped him off for contact with his mum, and not 30 minutes later I got a call from his child safety officer stating that he had officially been reunified – could I please drop his belongings off at the office so they could take them to him. No warning, no plan, no goodbye for our family or other children, not a thing. I was aghast. Not only had child safety lied to the previous carers, but they also had not clued us in on the plan. This was the first time that I ever felt like a “glorified babysitter” and not a part of the team that cares for these children, but it wouldn't be the last.

A few months later we had a call about a newborn baby boy, we needed to pick him up from the hospital that day. I arrived, and his grandmother was present, I greeted her and took a look at the tiny little baby in the bassinet, he had been 3 weeks early, but he was much too tiny for 3 weeks early, my assumption was growth difficulty.

[REDACTED] I pulled the nurse aside and quietly asked her if there were any difficulties or anything we should be aware of in taking care of this baby – I had not been given any information when we were called about the placement, but I should have been, as it was obvious. The nurse looked me right in the eye and said no, nothing was wrong, nothing abnormal. Come to find out the child had [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

But you would think, some transparency on giving vital information when calling a carer regarding a placement would be helpful. What would have happened if I didn't feel competent in caring for that child?

A few years later we had a newborn come into our care. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I was working with the Child Safety Officer on whether the [REDACTED] could be placed together, siblings have a right to reside together if possible. The other carer was still adamant that she didn't want a baby, so they began to assess if having the older child come into our care was a viable option. At this point the newborn was now around 8 months old. They approved us as the placement for the older child, and we were asked to work out a transition plan – and then the Child Safety Officer, half of her team, and her team leader all left, in one fell swoop – the CSO told me that she couldn't handle the atmosphere and leadership at [REDACTED] Service Centre any longer. We were left in the middle of the ocean with no life ring. We had no CSO or Team Leader for months, the other carer refused to work with us, and the bio-grandmother flew in from [REDACTED] didn't want us to have the children in our care (We had met her twice).

When a new team leader and CSO came on board (about 3.5 months later) they would not communicate with us, not responding to emails or calls, for another 6 weeks. They eventually told us that they needed to reassess decisions as the bio-grandmother was not happy. There's so much more that goes into this story, the other carer changed her mind and told us she would not lose the toddler, who was like her child. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The other carer and bio-grandma began working together to call the new CSO and Team Leader, telling them we couldn't handle both children (no proof of this at all). We finally came to a point where Child Safety called my support service (at the time [REDACTED] – who were amazing by the way) and asked them not to tell us (they wanted to inform us in a meeting) that they would be removing the baby from us and placing her with the other carer. Obviously, [REDACTED] did not want us blindsided in a meeting and told us. The meeting we had after we were informed was

pointless, child safety didn't listen to a word we said, and instead told us that both our file and the other carers file were unblemished so it was a hard pick, but bio-grandma picking the other carer had been the final "tie-breaker", like we weren't talking about children's lives, but an animal race? They spent the whole meeting defending themselves and not taking our concerns on board at all. It left us feeling disillusioned, disempowered, and ultimately, we wanted to quit.

We tried to put in a complaint, but it just got rerouted back to [REDACTED] child safety service centre. The manager called us, told us we were amazing carers, but she had to send me a letter stating they were actively removing the child from our care as "that's protocol". She thanked us for all we had done, was regretful and said she would "try to put training into her staff around problems such as these". She left me broken and wanting to quit. I would have, my husband strongly wanted to quit, but we had a little one in our care, and we didn't want to displace her.

Now, out of all of these stories you may think "Eh, child safety didn't include these carers in their plans, didn't disclose medical issues, and didn't support the carers (with no CSO or Team Leader for months) and then wrongfully "removed" a child from their care, but that's only three instances in ten years." But I'd like to say, that's only three major instances, there have been many other things in those years that I witnessed that was not okay. I have one final story though, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]



As Carers we go through a lot, we give up jobs, access to super, wages, our biological children miss out on having our attention 100% of the time, they give up having us attend games, plays, concerts, etc because we are dealing with a meltdown or a biological parent. Second hand trauma is not recognized or talked about, it isn't even mentioned to carers in training. Prospective carers are not given the full truth of the brutality of the Foster Care System, and no one quite understands what all the laws are, except the one bio-parent who can read through every single bit of legislation and wield it like the sword it is. No Bio-parent should be able to go outside of child safety to get what they want. And in some cases, child safety hasn't been able to protect bub, how is that safety? Quite often, the stigma attached with Child Safety means that QCAT favours the parent, even though they don't know the back story or what brought Child Safety to the decision they made, or what else has happened. Carers are not given info about the children coming into their care – no one told us anything about bubs mum, we had to glean little bits of info ourselves, for months. And on top of that, I've worked with parents who want their children back, and Child Safety doesn't give them all of the info, so they don't know what they can and can not do.

It's a broken system, one that has brought me great joy – supporting families that needed it and watching children go home to parents who love them, and great sorrow – feeling trapped, abused and like the system doesn't actually protect children but protects biological parents. Sometimes family isn't always best, sometimes family hurts more than the alternative.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I would happily continue the conversation. Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions, I want to be as involved in this inquiry as possible because it's sorely needed and children need to be put at the forefront of every decision.



