



Glen'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.

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Introduction

I am a foster carer based in Queensland, with three years of experience providing care to children involved in the child protection system. This submission is informed by my direct experience caring for children, engaging with Child Safety, and navigating the foster care system on a day-to-day basis.

My intent in making this submission is to contribute constructively to the Commission of Inquiry by highlighting systemic issues that undermine child-centred outcomes, placement stability, and carer sustainability. While policy settings often reflect appropriate intent, their implementation frequently fails children and carers in practice.

Experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children

Cultural plans are referenced as critical components of Aboriginal care but are rarely delivered in practice. Without enforced, practical and actively implemented cultural plans, carers cannot adequately meet children's needs, nor can informed decisions be made about reunification or long-term care.

Recommendation: Cultural care plans should be mandatory, time-bound, actively implemented and embedded within placement agreements, with accountability mechanisms to ensure deliver.

Availability of Carers

The shortage of foster carers has direct and significant consequences for children. Children remain in unsafe environments longer than necessary, are increasingly placed in residential care, and existing carers are stretched beyond sustainable limits.

Carers are routinely subjected to emotional pressure and guilt when declining placements, despite having legitimate capacity limits. This practice contributes directly to burnout and carer exits - worsening the shortage and reducing placement stability for children.

Child Safety Commission of Inquiry



Access to Respite

Access to respite is critically inadequate. On multiple occasions I have requested respite only to be told it was unavailable. Rather than being treated as preventative support, respite requests are often met with judgement, intrusive questioning and negotiations to reduce the duration. Additional respite appears to be treated as a bargaining tool between agency worker rather than as essential support for carers and children.

In one instance, despite providing significant notice of a pre-planned holiday, arrangements were left until the last minute, forcing me to rely on my personal support network to ensure continuity of care. This situation is unacceptable and highlights why foster care is not considered a viable option by many prospective carers.

Recommendation: Respite should be treated as essential support, with clear processes and reasonable response timeframes.

Pressure and Boundaries

Foster Care Agreements (FCAs) are routinely treated as flexible guidelines rather than enforceable boundaries. Early in my fostering experience, I was placed with multiple children in breach of my FCA, placing me in an untenable position as a single person household working full time. While driven by system pressure, this practice exploits carer's compassion and emotional vulnerability.

Even after revising my FCA to one primary placement with up to two respite placements, I continue to be contacted for placements beyond my capacity. Boundary-setting is often interpreted as a lack of commitment. On one occasion, my agency worker responded to my revised FCA by stating "so you will no longer help us out".

Recommendation: Carers require their boundaries to be respected and the FCA to be a hard boundary that is not up for negotiation by the agencies.

Restrictions

Excessive restrictions placed on foster carers undermine the goal of providing children with normal family experiences. Requests to include foster children in holidays are often delayed, inconsistently approved and framed as favours to carers rather than reasonable aspects of family life.

I requested approval to include my foster child of over two years in a four-week overseas holiday. This request was denied by the mother despite minimal family contact occurring during that period.

For shorter trips that do not impact contact, requiring permission rather than notification is unnecessary and excludes children from normal family routines. These issues are widely discussed among carers and discourages long-term commitment to fostering.

Child Safety Commission of Inquiry



Recommendation: Where contact is unaffected, holiday travel should require notification rather than approval. Where approval is required, clear timelines, transparent decision-making and an escalation pathway should exist.

Treatment

Treating foster carers as purely transitional placements diminishes the value of the role and disregards the emotional welling of both carers and children. Reunification decisions are often communicated abruptly. An 11-year-old boy placed with me for over 18 months was reunified and I was notified by a phone call to advise he won't come home from the visit he had that day.

While reunification is positive, the absence of structured reunification planned retraumatizes children and carers. Clear, child-centred reunification plans should be mandatory to ensure transitions are humane, predictable and supportive.

Recommendation: Clear, planned and child-centred reunifications processes should be mandatory and followed to ensure transitions are predictable, humane and supportive.

Early intervention and prevention

Support for parents, particularly during rehabilitation, is critical to reunification. In one case, a parent made genuine efforts to detox and disengage from harmful environments but lost her entire support network in the process. Expecting parents to abandon their community without providing alternative support is unrealistic and undermines reunification efforts. Parents, like carers, need connection, stability and community to succeed.

Laws and Legislation

Section 62 of the Child Protection Act limits interim and short-term orders to a total of 24 months unless reunification is likely or longer periods is demonstrably in the child's best interests. My current foster child has been in my care for 2.5 years on interim and short-term orders, with consideration being another short-term order. This is inconsistent with her developmental need for stability, particularly as she approaches schooling age, and does not reflect the weak and inconsistent family contact.

Recommendation: The Act requires clearer guidance on the justification for extending short-term orders beyond two years, supported by defined criteria. These should prioritise the child's stability, attachments and sense of permanence, rather than aspirational reunification without evidence of progress.

Closing

Foster Carers play a critical role in the child safety system, yet current practices often prioritise system pressure over child-centred outcomes and sustainable carer engagement. Meaningful reform must place children lived experience, developmental needs and carer's capacity at the centre of decision-making. Without such reform, placement instability, carer attrition and poor long-term outcomes for children in care will continue.

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I thank the Queensland Child Safety Commission of Inquiry for the opportunity to make this submission and for considering the lived experience of foster carers in its work.

