Child Safety
Commission of Inquiry

Marla’s story

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From the very beginning, navigating the child safety system has been overwhelming, exhausting, and heartbreaking. My family approached them asking for help, guidance, and support. Instead, we were met with hostility, intimidation, and a lack of understanding. The system that is supposed to protect children has, in our case, caused more trauma than it has prevented. In this case the system has taken 1 of my 5 children, she has complex disabilities.

From the first interactions, staff were demanding and rude. They insulted us in our own home, used bullying tactics, and even threatened to take all of my children from my care simply because I was working. Opinions were treated as facts, without evidence, and we were punished for simply trying to live our lives. On one occasion, a CPS worker told my partner—who served ten years in the Defence Force, including overseas deployment—that he “shouldn’t have PTSD” because he has been out longer than he was in. That was not only false, it was deeply insulting and dismissive of real trauma.

The record-keeping has been another major issue. Their notes consistently take statements out of context, exaggerate negatives, and completely ignore anything positive. When I pointed out errors, they were never corrected. These inaccuracies created a false narrative about our family, causing stress and frustration and leaving us constantly having to fight to be seen and heard.

We reached out repeatedly for practical help and received none. We asked for support to access mental health services when faced with an 18-month waiting list, and for help to clean, organise, and create routines in our home. Nothing was provided. Asking for help should not feel like a punishment. Instead, we were left to struggle on our own, carrying the emotional weight of the system’s failures while trying to care for our children.

My daughter has complex disabilities and medical challenges, yet her carers were never provided with her medical information. I had to repeatedly explain her medications, her health needs, and how to care for her. The lack of communication placed her at risk and left me feeling exhausted, alone, and responsible for the safety of my child in a system that should have shared that responsibility.

Most of the staff had little to no understanding of families raising children with disabilities. Their lack of awareness meant my daughter's needs were often ignored or dismissed. Navigating the NDIS, which is already complex, was made even harder by the lack of support from Child Safety. If the system had worked with us rather than against us, we could have received the support we desperately needed.

The system also failed to follow its own protocols. Contact reviews were promised every six to eight weeks, but in reality, they occurred at 12 weeks, nine weeks, and now over nine weeks have passed without a review. I have **not been able to see my daughter for over two weeks**, and Child Protection Services will not allow phone calls, so I cannot even call to say hello. Supervised visits have continued for six months despite **no negative feedback** from the organisation supervising them, who themselves do not understand why supervision continues. Stakeholder meetings promised monthly due to my daughter's complex needs have barely occurred; the last one was in March and only because her NDIS coordinator organised it. A plan review due at the end of August has still not happened.

The emotional toll on my children has been devastating. My daughter has experienced more trauma while in the system than she would have at home if we had been properly supported. Each missed contact, every delay, has caused heartbreak. Hearing, *"I'm sorry you missed your contact"* has left deep scars on her and her little sister. This is supposed to be a system that protects children, yet it has inflicted fear, sadness, and anxiety on the very people it claims to safeguard.

The impact of this system has not only affected my immediate family. Our extended family has been stressed and fearful for the children's wellbeing. My work and colleagues have been affected because I've had to drop shifts to accommodate visits and meetings. Our family, our relationships, our ability to live normal, stable lives, has been disrupted at every level.

When I submitted a formal complaint, I received a phone call from the head of my case, claiming to be from the complaints department. She said the complaint would be investigated. Nothing changed. Complaints are not taken seriously, and families are left feeling powerless and unheard.

Staff often cite professional qualifications in psychology, yet many actions contradict ethical codes. I am studying in this field and know that ethical standards demand respect, honesty, accuracy, and avoiding harm. The staff's actions—intimidation, dismissive comments about trauma, exaggerating negatives—breach these standards. If qualifications are used to assert authority, there must be accountability when ethics are ignored.

This system has almost broken me. The constant fear, stress, and heartbreak have left my family and me emotionally drained. My children have been hurt. Their little hearts have carried pain that could have been avoided. My partner, my extended family, my work colleagues—we have all been affected. Life that should have been stable and secure has been disrupted by a system that has failed to do its job.

Recommendations for Change

I believe the following changes are essential:

- Mandatory trauma-informed, respectful communication training.
- Accurate, balanced records with a correction process.
- Families actively seeking help should be supported practically and emotionally.
- Carers must receive full medical and health information.
- Enforceable timelines for contact reviews, stakeholder meetings, and plan reviews.
- Transparent, independent complaint processes.
- Access to mental health services and in-home support.
- Staff must uphold ethical standards if they claim psychology or counselling qualifications.
- Improved disability awareness.
- Simplified, accessible NDIS processes.

- Families should not have to choose between work and Child Safety obligations.
- Supervised visits only when risks exist, with a clear pathway to unsupervised contact.
- Constructive feedback to families about their interactions with staff, promoting transparency, cooperation, and trust.

Conclusion

My family's story is not just about missed protocols or bureaucratic failures. It is about **real children experiencing real trauma**, about parents feeling powerless and unheard, and about a system that should protect but has caused pain. Without urgent reform, children like mine, their families, and the wider community will continue to suffer.

We approached the system for support. Instead, it has almost broken us. This is why change is not optional—it is necessary.