



Molly's story

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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.

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This submission was assisted by Speaking Up For You (SUFY)

Background

Molly is a Maori woman with an intellectual disability who has engaged with the Queensland child protection system both as a parent of her three children and as an extended family member to her niece. Molly's experiences with child safety and related services span many years and involve the removal of her own children in the past, as well as the most recent child protection involvement concerning her niece, who is currently subject to a short-term custody child protection order.

Molly reports that during previous child safety involvement with her own children, she participated in parenting programs, reunification supports and service interventions as required. The children were placed with Molly's sister as a kin carer during this period, and she worked with services, including reunification service providers, in an effort to demonstrate and build her capacity to parent and remain connected to her children.

Parenting Supports and Services lack disability knowledge, skills and awareness

Although Molly engaged with all the requested services, she reports that her disability needs were not properly considered. She describes many of the parenting programs as difficult to relate to, lacking dignity, and not relevant to her as a parent with disability. Molly noted that services and parenting courses had "no one with disability or focused on that to show us". One service,

"██████████ were there to help, but they get a bit lazy, and with different workers all the time and

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straight out of uni with no kids, they don't understand". Molly went on to describe a course she was sent to at a High School, and "it was really daunting going in there, didn't want to go or be there, they need to make it better, there was no privacy, and they wanted you to talk about things in front of everyone." "They had a doll that they were using and going around in a circle and pretending it was throwing up and stuff." "It was really bad and not okay", "offensive". Another service, "Lifeline tried to help me get back with my kids. There was a reunification service, which tried to help but was also not listened to by Child Safety." "I couldn't keep going."

Although some services attempted to assist, Molly describes frequent worker changes and limited continuity of support also impacting on any progress made to demonstrate parenting capacity. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises that parents with disability are entitled to support that enables them to care for their children on an equal basis with others.

Family and Kin Care Not Properly Considered Before Removal of Child

Molly is currently concerned about the involvement of child safety with her niece, who was removed from the hospital shortly after birth and placed under child protection orders. Molly reports that no extended family meeting occurred before her niece was removed and that family members were not meaningfully consulted about whether there were safe kinship care options within the family. Molly states that, *"We were family and ready to help, but nobody asked us."*

The lack of structured family participation before the removal of her niece reflects concerns commonly raised by families with disability who report that major decisions are often made before the extended family is properly consulted.

Research indicates that early family engagement and family-led decision-making approaches, particularly through Family Group Conferencing, improve family participation in case planning, strengthen parental engagement, and can reduce the likelihood or duration of out-of-home care when implemented early and with appropriate support.

The Queensland child protection framework recognises kinship care as a preferred option, yet families continue to report barriers in how this is explored in practice.

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Molly reports that she was excluded from planning regarding her niece's care. *"There were no family meetings"*. There was a lack of clear consultation and a limited opportunity for the extended family to identify opportunities and plans for assisting in the care of Molly's niece.

Molly explains that her sister had previously cared for Molly's own children when in the custody of child safety, yet this carer role has not been actively considered when planning care arrangements for her niece. This includes considerations in assisting with family time, cultural events, and activities. The child's father also reportedly requested stakeholder meetings with child safety, but did not receive a response.

Molly describes that major decisions occur without family involvement. *"It felt like everything had already been decided before we knew what was happening."*

Family participation in decision-making is a known core protective factor for children, particularly where kinship relationships and family identity can be maintained.

Where families are excluded early, opportunities for culturally safe placement and ongoing family connection are significantly reduced.

Cultural Identity and Family Connection

Molly identifies strongly with her Maori culture and reports that this has not been properly recognised within child safety processes. Molly explains that cultural planning appeared to focus narrowly on Aboriginal identity (in which the children share) while Maori identity and family cultural practices are continually overlooked.

Molly reports wanting her niece to maintain a connection to Maori family culture and purchased traditional clothing for her, hoping she could attend Maori cultural events. However, Molly states that *"family were told that my niece could not attend cultural events with them"*. Molly explains, *"Culture is who we are. It matters for children to know where they come from."*

Molly also reports that previous psychological assessments involving her family did not adequately recognise Maori family perspectives or cultural ways of understanding relationships and caregiving. Research consistently demonstrates that cultural identity contributes significantly to child wellbeing, belonging, and long-term resilience for children involved in care systems.

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Family Contact Experiences and Trauma

Molly reports that contact visits with children have often occurred in environments that trigger distress and trauma. Molly describes visits taking place inside child safety offices and in shared rooms with multiple families present, which she says felt highly *“uncomfortable and no privacy”*. Molly reports that during visits, workers sometimes raised unrelated administrative matters such as medication, drug testing, or service requirements, reducing time available for family interaction. Molly states that *“That time should be about the child, not paperwork.”*

Molly also recalls feeling humiliated when sensitive personal matters were discussed in front of others during contact arrangements.

Trauma-informed practice is widely recognised as essential in child protection settings, particularly where families have previous experiences of removal, violence, disability, or system-related distress. The quality of family contact visit can significantly affect both child well-being and family relationships.

Disability Communication Needs and Barriers

Molly reports ongoing difficulties obtaining clear and accurate information from child safety. Family members have not consistently been informed of court dates, placement decisions, or major developments affecting Molly’s niece.

At times, information has reportedly come through foster carers rather than directly from child safety. Molly explains she would like simple family updates including photographs, milestones, and reassurance that the family connection remains valued. Molly states *“You shouldn’t have to wonder how your family is doing.”*

Families connected to child safety often report that inconsistent communication increases distress and reduces trust in the system.

Accessible and effective communication is especially important where a person’s disability impacts on understanding of complex legal or procedural processes.



Understanding Child Behaviour and Trauma

Based on Molly's previous experience with her own children in care, she believes some behaviours were interpreted without recognising the impact of trauma and separation.

Molly recalls one of her children experiencing bedwetting and behavioural distress while in care, which she believes reflected grief and disruption rather than parenting concerns. Molly notes that *"Children react when they miss family. That should be understood."*

Research consistently demonstrates that children separated from family may display trauma responses, including regression, anxiety, and behavioural changes.

This case study highlights barriers experienced by parents and extended family members with disability interacting with the child safety system, particularly where disability, family participation, trauma, and cultural identity intersect. Molly's experience reflects known systemic concerns about whether families with disability are provided with accessible supports, meaningful inclusion in decisions, and culturally responsive practice.

Molly's story highlights the need for stronger disability-informed, trauma-aware, culturally responsive and family-inclusive practice within the child protection system.

Molly recommends:

- Family meetings should occur before removal
- Extended family should be actively included in decisions
- Kinship care options should be genuinely explored
- Parenting supports should be designed for parents with disability
- Maori identity should be recognised within cultural planning
- Contact visits should occur in respectful and child-friendly settings
- Families should receive regular updates and information

Molly states:

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“Families need support before decisions are made, not after everything has already happened.”

