



Janell'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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I am making this submission as a professional with over 30 years' experience in the human services sector. I am also a former long-term foster carer to three siblings who are now in their 30s and continue to refer to me as "Mum." I understand the child protection system, mandatory reporting obligations, trauma-informed care, and the importance of procedural fairness.

This submission relates to my experience involving my foster daughter and her three-year-old daughter, Child A, between 2025 and 2026. What I outline below raises serious concerns regarding decision-making, communication, procedural fairness, and the trauma imposed on a young child and her family.

In 2025, Child A's father absconded with her, and her whereabouts were unknown for three months. This resulted in Family Court proceedings, after which shared custody arrangements were put in place. Subsequently, the father and his new partner were involved in domestic violence incidents, leading to police and Child Safety involvement. Child A was removed from their care.

Allegations were made by the father and his partner that Child A's uncle, my foster son, now 31 years old, had sexually abused her. To my knowledge, no investigation was conducted into this allegation at the time it was made. Despite this when police were again involved, Child A was taken into my care and not the mother's due to the allegations.

It is critical to note that the uncle does not reside in Child A's home and is only an infrequent visitor. Child A's mother has never been accused of any abuse, neglect, or wrongdoing. The only substantiated concerns historically have involved the father. Despite this, Child A's mother was not permitted to have her daughter in her care due to the uninvestigated allegation against the uncle. Inconsistently, Child A was permitted to spend time with the uncle at Christmas, yet she was not permitted to be returned to her mother's care. I found this contradictory and procedurally unjust, prompting me to submit a Ministerial complaint due to the apparent inequity.

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From November 2025 through March 2026, Child A remained in my care. During this period, my interactions with Child Safety were extremely challenging. I was never consulted in a meaningful way regarding the practical impact of this placement on my employment or wellbeing. I work full-time, yet I was required to travel 72 kilometres each way twice weekly to facilitate one-hour supervised visits. I exhausted my annual leave, sick leave, and family leave entitlements to comply with visitation requirements.

On multiple occasions, I arrived for scheduled visits only to be told the father had another appointment. On another occasion, I was informed upon arrival that the mother had a conflicting appointment. The paternal grandmother requested weekend overnight visits but cancelled twice after I had already travelled to facilitate the contact. She later requested halfway changeovers, which Child Safety agreed to without consultation with me. I advised I would not participate in halfway arrangements and that if she wished to see Child A, she could return her directly. In response, she began dropping Child A even further away, requiring me to travel additional distance to collect her on Sunday afternoons.

I requested that the father's visits be moved from 11:00am to 9:00am to minimise the impact on my employment. He declined. Despite being unemployed, his preference was upheld. His new partner was permitted to attend visits; however, no member of the maternal family was allowed to attend the mother's visits. Child A's mother does not own a vehicle and travelled two hours each way via public transport for a one-hour supervised visit.

The emotional impact on Child A during visitation was deeply concerning. She would cling to me, visibly shaking and begging not to attend visits with her father. She was exposed to the distress of other children crying during supervised contact sessions. When I raised the level of distress with the Child Safety Officer, I was told, "They get used to it." As a trauma-informed practitioner, I found this response alarming. Removal from a primary caregiver is itself traumatic; repeated exposure to distressing visitation environments compounds that trauma.

Throughout this placement, I received no meaningful support. I was verbally offered fuel and food vouchers on several occasions but never received them. I share my apartment with a flatmate due to rental increases and had to ask him to leave to accommodate Child A. This process took approximately eight weeks, during which time I bore significant financial strain. I purchased clothing, a car seat, furniture, and essential items. The cost of petrol alone was substantial due to the volume of required travel. Financial support was delayed and inconsistent.

Communication was consistently poor. When I attempted to raise concerns, the Child Safety Officer frequently spoke over me and used technical language without engaging in genuine discussion. I did not feel heard or respected as a carer or as a professional. When I escalated concerns to the team leader, I was redirected back to the same officer.

I was initially told I would have Child A for three nights. Five nights later, after I sought clarification, I was informed the matter was going to court for a 28-day extension pending investigation. No further information or support was

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provided. The 28 days was extended again without proactive communication. I was not formally notified; I had to make enquiries.

I was later told Child A would return to her mother. I asked whether her mother had been informed so she could plan for childcare, food, and financial arrangements. I was told she “should not have to plan as she is the mother.” This response demonstrates a fundamental lack of understanding of practical parenting realities, particularly given that the mother had lost her housing due to legal fees and financial hardship arising from the father’s actions. She is currently boarding with another person, which itself has created barriers to reunification.

No confirmation has been provided regarding Child A’s return home. This ongoing uncertainty has been profoundly stressful.

This experience highlights systemic issues: lack of procedural fairness, failure to investigate allegations in a timely manner, inconsistent application of safety reasoning, poor communication, inadequate support to kinship carers, and insufficient recognition of the trauma caused to children through prolonged uncertainty and poorly managed contact arrangements.

I remain deeply concerned about the emotional wellbeing of a three-year-old child who has experienced abduction, domestic violence exposure, violence committed on her, removal from her primary caregiver, and distressing supervised contact. I am equally concerned about the treatment of her mother, who has never been accused of harm yet has faced barriers that have contributed to homelessness and instability.

I respectfully submit that reform is needed in communication practices, carer support, trauma-informed visitation processes, and procedural fairness in decision-making. Children’s safety must remain paramount, but it must be balanced with consistency, evidence-based assessment, and respect for families and carers who step forward in times of crisis.

This has been one of the most distressing professional and personal experiences of my career. No child should endure this level of instability, and no kinship carer should be left without support in navigating it.

I provide this submission in good faith, with the hope that lessons can be learned and systemic improvements implemented.